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V. 41

Gordon Young
H. Bedford-Jones
Eugene Cunningham
Robert Simpson
St. St. Mars
A. D. Newsom
Clements Ripley
William Ashley Anderson
John Joseph
J. H. Greene
Everett Saunders and
Edison Fowler
Magda Leigh

Complete Novelettes

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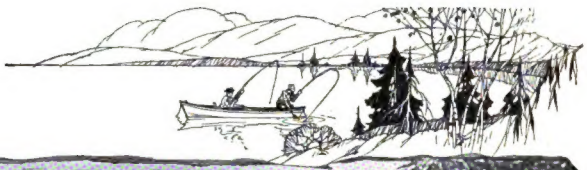

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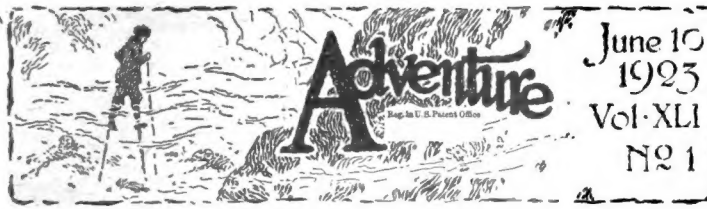

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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A Novel and Two Novelettes Complete

CLANG! Clang out! You prison bells of Sing Sing, clang! Clang! Clang! And you, you thirteen old fools of Doom Vale—quake! Shake in your shoes! Shiver! Because the *Killer*, the *Strangler*, has broken jail, and he's after you! "THE FOOL KILLER," a mystery novel by Joel Townsley Rogers, complete in the next issue.

CONFRONTED by a problem involving the smuggling of Chinese across the Border, *Sheriff Bill Garfield* adopts unusual methods to discover the criminal, with a surprizing result. "APPEARANCES," a complete novelette by F. R. Buckley in the next issue.

IN THE Southern swamp country, along with his wise old Chinese cook and the little dog he has bought, lives a miser who looks on his fellow men as legitimate objects of prey. Then things start to come out of the past. "THE FLUSHER," by Anthony M. Rud, is a novelette complete in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

***Adventure* is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**

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Adventure

June 10
1923
Vol. LXI
No 1

BAD BUSINESS

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by Robert Simpson

Author of "With Hands and Teeth," "White Man's Boots," etc.

MURVEY was the skipper of the *Buwalla*, a somber, black-hulled, iron-decked gin-tank plying between Hamburg and the Oil Rivers. Of middle height, ruddy of complexion and blue of eye, he belied his appearance in so decided a fashion that he was known from Conakry to Old Calabar as "Scurvy Murvey," and it was always extremely difficult for him to sign on a Krooboy deck gang at Grand Cess.

This said all that was necessary to any Coaster, however inexperienced, and when the *Buwalla* dropped anchor in any of the Niger or Cross Rivers creeks, no one rejoiced.

Kingdon, who was Marsden & Co.'s agent at Warri, always found it advisable to keep an eye on Balloch, his beach clerk, whenever the *Buwalla* came into the river.

As it was a trading-station beach clerk's job to superintend all matters pertaining to shipping, it was Balloch's duty to come into contact with Captain Murvey and his officers and crew whether he liked it or not. And Balloch did not like it.

He liked it least because Kingdon's quiet, apparently disinterested but astonishingly watchful eye seemed to keep him within range at all times on these occasions. And though Kingdon, up and down and around was something less than half the size of Balloch, who was tall and lean and gifted with a punch that was hardly short of murderous, the big beach clerk was palpably afraid of incurring Kingdon's displeasure.

His fellow assistants, both of them big

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men, did not sneer at him for this. Harth, the shop clerk and senior assistant, who was a large, red-headed, button-mouthed man who looked like a farmer and whistled like a canary, approved of it. And Samuel Brown, the junior assistant and kernel clerk, who was as out of place in a kernel store as a floor-walker in a fish shop; who disliked Balloch on general principles and who was likely to sneer politely but most heartily at anything Balloch was or had or did—even Samuel did not consider Balloch's timid respect for Kingdon's authority an unusual thing.

Nor did any one else, from the smallest cook's mate or bushel trader, to Lionel Danby Fosdyck, C. M. G., who was the provincial commissioner, and whose headquarters were at the upper end of the settlement.

All of these, native and white, knew Kingdon of Marsden & Co., and Massachusetts for what he was, largely for reasons that have previously been related; and if the native estimate of his attributes and powers was a trifle exaggerated, inasmuch as he was credited with *ju-ju* propensities which he made no pretense of possessing, the opinions of his white contemporaries were built upon a sound foundation.

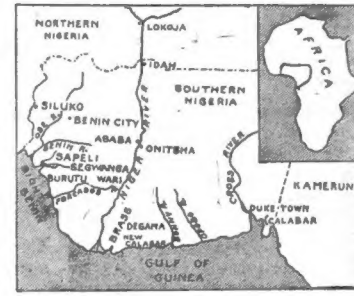
Murvey, of the *Buwalla*, however, did not believe it. He was the kind of man who, being first of all a disappointment to himself, had never forgiven himself for his failure, and was consequently disagreeable to every one else in proportion to his success.

Murvey had hoped to be a commodore of the line some day. But he was still walking the bridge of a gin-tank, and he knew now, he would continue to do so till he died. Naturally, this was not, from Murvey's viewpoint, a pleasant prospect, and his attitude toward it became less and less amenable with every trip he made to the fever-stricken, sun-scorched West Coast of Africa.

The first glimpse of Conakry—if he anchored there—and the usual Kroo-boy trouble at Grand Cess—these preliminary greetings with the Coast, were like the handshake indulged in between two prize fighters who were aching to settle a grudge.

At Sierra Leone, Murvey began getting into action; at Half Jack, Cape Coast Castle, Sekondi and Accra, the blue of his eyes became blacker and blacker, and when he poked the *Buwalla's* nose across the Forcados sand-bar, and began to grope his way through the Delta's narrow, bush-bound creeks, he cursed that gloomy blot upon creation in a loud and nasty fashion, and added a particularly chosen blasphemy that was directed at the name of trade.

Several trips after Kingdon had come to Warri as Marsden & Co's. agent, Murvey



added him to his list of pet aversions; the kind he began thinking of while the *Buwalla* was still plowing her way through the North Sea.

Balloch knew this because he had heard Murvey intimate as much to his second officer; and as Balloch had at once invited the skipper to discuss the matter with him in detail on shore, Kingdon had thereafter taken the precaution to see to it that Balloch did not precipitate matters.

Murvey had, of course, declined Balloch's invitation; ignored it, in fact. A beach clerk was not in his class at all. It was one thing to kick his crew around his own decks, and quite another to engage in a brawl with a Delta palm-oil ruffian who would have no scruples about hitting back.

Instead, Murvey had referred the matter to Kingdon's close attention with the assertion that no unprintable trader's assistant had ever talked to him like that before, and that if he, Kingdon, could not keep a better grip on his men than this episode indicated, there was a mail steamer at Forcados that would carry him safely and rapidly out of trouble.

And Kingdon had smiled and said pleasantly—

"Have another drink."

Murvey did not like this, and when he came back to Warri and brought the

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Buwalla alongside Marsden's wharf to deposit several thousand cases of trade gin thereon, the whirr and rattle of the ship's asthmatic donkey engine was not unlike a call to battle.

All morning, while the square stack of green cases spread itself out on the wharf; while Balloch's Kroo-boys sweated in an effort to avoid working overtime; while the water boy poured kerosene cans of water on the blistering wharf and down the arid Kroo-boys' throats; while Balloch kept one eye on the gin and the other on the *Buwalla's* decks, Kingdon sat on his veranda keeping both eyes on Balloch.

It was nearly four o'clock when Murvey came ashore. There was no more gin in the *Buwalla's* hold for Marsden's, and the Kroo-boys were removing the cases to the gin store at a gait that suggested they had plenty of time to spare before four bells came around again. Balloch was, therefore, no longer on the wharf. He was on duty in the gin store, and Samuel Brown who had taken his place on the wharf would not have paid any attention to Murvey if the latter had been twice as big and the skipper of a Castle Liner.

Murvey, for his part, had never seen Samuel before, and though Samuel's manner should have led the *Buwalla's* skipper to suspect that Samuel considered himself several liberal cuts above the ordinary, Murvey did not take the trouble to give the matter of Samuel's opinion of himself a thought. Murvey saw a new face that belonged to a trading-beach kernel clerk and that was all that was necessary for him.

"Well, young fellah," he greeted him with a generous but doubtful sympathy that went out to all newcomers to the Delta. "Trying your hand at this rotten game? How long do you think *you* are going to last?"

Samuel, who was just then giving all of his attention to the diminishing stack of gin, turned toward Murvey at his leisure.

"I beg your pardon. Were you addressing me?"

Murvey did not know Samuel. He thought he was being impertinent whereas he was only being natural. So he at once splashed Samuel with ever ready blasphemy which, with gin-tank skippers is a gift, and, refusing to listen to anything Samuel might have to say in rebuttal, passed on.

Thus did Balloch and Samuel Brown, who had little or no respect for each other, become allies, each without the other's knowledge or consent.

KINGDON was not smiling when Murvey strutted into his office and he did not mention that he knew the most recent cause of the florid skipper's perturbation. It was wholly unnecessary in any case.

"Why the —— is it, Kingdon, that I can't bring my ship alongside your beach without runnin' into a lot of pups who give themselves airs or talk to me as if I were the second engineer on a branch boat?"

The second engineer on a Lagos to Forcados branch boat either did not exist at all, or was of just as much importance if he did.

"Who is that ossified nincompoop on the wharf any way? And where do you get 'em? They're certainly hand-picked."

Kingdon looked interested.

"What's the trouble this time, skipper?"

"Trouble! I asked that ruddy fool down there how he liked this rotten business——"

"And he didn't think it was quite so rotten? Let's go out on the veranda and have a drink."

Murvey paused flat-footed, and as he watched Kingdon stroll out to the veranda, the weather-beaten red of his cheeks paled off to a most unusual pink, and the glittering blue in his eyes became black. When he followed Kingdon, his heels bit into the pitch-pine boards in a manner that, on his own iron decks, made the fo'c'sle shiver.

"Now, look here, Kingdon——"

"I think you'll find that chair the most comfortable," Kingdon declared indicating a deck chair. "A transport department sailorman sewed the canvas for me. Take a look at the eyelets, or whatever you call them, and tell me what you think of them."

Murvey ignored Kingdon's invitation in all its parts. He leaned a heavy shoulder against a veranda upright and grinned a twisted grin.

"You're pretty clever—for your size. But I didn't come up here to swill liquor or listen to you talk. You've got over sixty tons of kernels in the store over there. Why don't I get 'em?"

Kingdon curled himself up in a huge Madeira chair.

"I don't like to ship less than a hundred tons," he said mildly. "You're just a week or two too early, that's all."

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"Keeping them for Parkes of the *Owassa?*" Murvey sneered. "He's a friend of yours, isn't he?"

Parkes was a friend of Kingdon's, but the little agent did not discriminate between ships or skippers when his kernel store or oil yard said it was time to ship.

"Is Parkes due? I hadn't thought about it."

"You're a liar," Murvey said without an exclamation point. "I haven't been comin' into these rivers all these years for nothing."

Kingdon laughed softly and uncurled himself out of the chair.

"Better run along, Murvey. You're not amusing any more. And while you are at it, take your ship with you. She spoils the appearance of my wharf."

This was most unkind. Also it was a deliberate misrepresentation of the facts, because Marsden's wharf was old and small and inadequate. The scars of several thousands of battles with the tropical elements were thick upon it. Many of its surface planks had warped themselves loose from their tenpenny nail moorings, and the hardwood wharf piles were no longer giving their unqualified support.

In fact, Kingdon was shortly going to replace the wharf with a new one, and Chief Obena, who undertook contracts of the sort, was almost daily supplying him with long, round hardwood logs that would serve as piles.

However, Kingdon made no apologies for his slur on the *Buwalla*. Neither did he have any regrets. He walked past Murvey and back into his office, displaying no exaggerated appearance of nonchalance or any hint of anger. He had never appeared more natural or less conscious of himself than he did then. And Murvey knew it.

The skipper did not rage or stamp. He gaped. He saw a frail-looking little man with a lean, white face, set with quiet, dark eyes, look and speak and move and put him, Murvey, in his place, with an unostentatious fearlessness that appalled.

To Murvey, accustomed to the kind of authority that spoke with a megaphone voice and a forty-two inch chest, Kingdon should have been a joke. Therefore, for a minute or two, Murvey groped on the outskirts of mystery and looked rather foolish in the process.

Then because he did not like to look or feel foolish at any time, he strutted after Kingdon as far as the office door.

"Spoils the looks of your wharf, does she?" he shouted, his voice lifting higher than he knew. "You don't call that thing a wharf!"

Kingdon chose to be deaf to Murvey's sarcasm, as the rattle of dishes on a tea tray sounded not far off.

"Hunh!" The skipper stood in the doorway, the corners of his mouth drawing down contemptously while he tried to think of something really clever and caustic to say. "You're a —— of a trading agent, you are."

And then there was the slight scuff of a rubber-soled boot. A large, red-headed, farmer-like figure stood suddenly at Murvey's side. Harth, the shop clerk, on his way to luxuriate in a leisurely four o'clock "tea" in his own room, looked down at Murvey with an expression of envious interest.

"Hello, skipper," pleasantly. "Just going? You'll have a nice afternoon for it."

"Eh?"

"It must be quite a sensation to be the captain of a ship and sail away on an afternoon like this. The water's lovely."

Murvey snorted and sputtered and looked Harth up and down. His eyes paused when they came to Harth's hands, which were huge and heavy and hard.

Kingdon moved across his office toward a couch and picked up an old copy of a magazine, apparently taking no interest in Harth's sudden appearance. Murvey began to sidle away from the door toward the veranda rail, pulling one foot after the other with an assumption of carelessness that did not convince.

"Another clever young man, eh? Mother's bright child and the life of the party?"

Murvey's right foot headed unobtrusively but decisively for the stairs, but he kept his eyes fixed upon Harth's face which, within its limitations, tried to become more cherubic than ever.

"You certainly must be wonderful company for each other."

Harth laughed.

"Little fat men, who have not yet sailed away, should not be saucy. And captains of ships are not usually carried on board by the seat of the pants. At least, I've never seen it done. Have you?"

Murvey was fat, but he was not little.

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And again he looked at the size of Harth's hands, the enormous width of his shoulders, and pillar-like solidity of his legs, and his experienced eyes caught a shrewd hint of the devastating speed that was behind all this. So, when Kingdon came indifferently toward the door, with the magazine in his hand, the skipper chose to laugh, although there was hardly a trace of color in his cheeks.

"Humor in a lump, eh? Wholesale?"

Harth began to whistle softly, like a prize song-bird, and, turning his back upon Murvey, saw Kingdon in the doorway.

"Oh, I just came along to tell you that that pansy-cloth is all gone. Could you let me know if we have any more of it?"

Kingdon knew this was a lie, even if the fact with respect to the pansy-cloth were true. He knew Harth had come there just then to protect him, but, as on several previous occasions, was doing his best to conceal it.

"I think there is another bale of it," Kingdon remarked casually, turning toward his desk again, and Harth followed as if Murvey did not exist. "I'll look it up."

The skipper of the *Buwalla* did not understand this, and he was in no mood at that moment to make any serious attempt to do so. With an appropriate burst of profanity, he stumped toward the stairs and down to the beach.

And he passed Samuel Brown, who still lingered on the wharf, as if Samuel had suddenly shriveled up and blown away.

Kingdon, with business-like soberness, looked into his records for the bale of pansy-cloth, and found that it existed. Harth nodded.

"All right. Thanks. I'll have Balloch send it in first thing in the morning."

Neither of them had a word to say about Captain Murvey.

THE skipper of the *Buwalla* reached his own deck in a state of mind so obvious that the bosun said "Yessir, yessir," in nervous agreement before Murvey had said anything. Murvey paid no attention to him and gave as little heed to his second officer who also happened to stand in his path to the bridge.

But there was no mistaking his mood, and even the *Buwalla* herself seemed to feel the shaking passion that was in her master's hand when she began obediently to slip away from Marsden & Co.'s wharf.

Perhaps she felt this passion just a little too much; or it may have been that the forward-hawser slacked off a little more sharply than the aft, or that there was not enough allowance made for the slightly treacherous swirl of the current. In any event, the *Buwalla's* nose veered too quickly toward mid-stream, bringing her stern, and the whirling propeller particularly, altogether too close to the wharf.

And in the succeeding thirty seconds Samuel Brown, and several Kroo-boys with him, assimilated all the effects of an earthquake.

As the *Buwalla's* stern crunched suddenly and heavily against the wharf, and her propeller hacked at the front row of wharf piles, much as a lawn-mower cuts grass, there was a snapping and tearing of rotten timbers, a thunderous tinkle of broken glass and a shrieking bedlam of excited voices in many keys and tongues.

The wharf swayed and heaved under Samuel's feet like a drunken thing, throwing him heavily backward, then it suddenly sagged forward amid a shower of splinters of wood and glass. After that, for a moment or two, save for a vague, distant muttering, there was silence.

Some one or something touched Samuel's shoulder, and, brushing his arm across his eyes he picked himself up shakily and saw at once that there was blood on his shirt front; blood that dripped copiously from somewhere about his face. He did not stop to find out where it came from; neither did he pay any attention to a rather dim little figure in white at his elbow.

The figure said something Samuel did not catch, partly because his head was swimming and partly because the first thing his eyes happened to rest upon when he got to his feet was the motionless figure of a Kroo-boy who was lying flat on his face at the outermost edge of the wharf, and who looked as if he would slide into the water at any moment.

There were other Kroo-boys lying around, but this one was farthest away, and Samuel went after him first. He moved down the shaky slope of the wharf only in the most instinctive way, not being at all sure of what he was doing and why. And when he reached the Kroo-boy and tried to lift him, that particular part of the wharf weaved suddenly and flung them both into the churning water along with the other splinters

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that were whirling in the maelstrom of the *Buwalla's* wake.

When they came up, Samuel sputtering and blowing and altogether awake, the Kroo-boy trying feebly to brush him away, the same small figure in white splashed in at Samuel's elbow.

"Can you manage him?" Kingdon asked, bobbing in the swirl at Samuel's side and making no effort to interfere.

Samuel turned his head. He exhibited no surprize at finding Kingdon so close upon his heels.

"Oh—quite well—thanks. The—gig-wharf—suppose—would be—safest place?"

Kingdon agreed it would and there was no further conversation on the matter even when they reached the gig-wharf. There, it was discovered that the Kroo-boy's skull was badly fractured, and when two of his compatriots had picked him up to carry him to the Kroo-house, and another had raced off to the consulate beach for Dr. Ramsay, Kingdon and Samuel clopped soggily around to the wrecked wharf again where Balloch and Harth and more Kroo-boys were picking unfortunates out of the wreckage.

"Better go on top," Kingdon advised simply, wiping mud and water from his face. "That cut on your cheek looks as if it might need a stitch or two."

Samuel was wet and muddy and bloody and generally a mess, but as always, he was still Samuel. He held a handkerchief to his cheek, and glanced out toward the river where the *Buwalla's* skipper was swearing without much conviction and bringing his ship nervously to anchor.

"Might I ask the name of the captain of that ship?"

"Murvey."

"Murvey? Oh, thanks."

And Samuel passed up-stairs without saying anything to the effect that he hated scars.

HARTH and Balloch were able to assure Kingdon that no one had been killed. One Kroo-boy had suffered a broken leg, and another, like Samuel, had been badly cut about the face with flying splinters of glass, but the others had suffered principally from shock, and would be none the worse for their experience the following morning.

A great part of what had been left of the stack of gin had been smashed or had toppled into the river. Several cases could be seen floating loggily down stream with numerous hungry canoes in pursuit, and already sundry diving parties were being organized to dig about in the mud for odd bottles and perhaps cases that had sunk close to the wharf after escaping the flailing of the *Buwalla's* propeller blades.

Balloch made his tally with ruthless exactitude and carried it up to Kingdon who had gone to his rooms to change. And when Murvey, who came ashore in his own gig, reached Kingdon's office again, the skipper's expression was at once anxious and respectful.

Morbright, the district commissioner, and Carruthers of the A. P. A. (African Produce Association), who was Lloyds agent in the river, were in Kingdon's office when Murvey stumped rather diffidently along the veranda. The D. C. had come along for some tobacco and to make sure that no one had been killed, and Carruthers had been sent for to put the seal of his official approval upon the righteousness of Kingdon's claim upon the steamship company.

Murvey stopped short in the doorway when he saw Morbright. Whatever of braggadocio he may have assumed on his way up-stairs, departed from him in a moment. His heavy shoulders and his lower jaw sagged so palpably that Kingdon felt sorry for him, and modified his claim at once.

"Come in, Murvey," he invited simply. "Several of my boys and one of my assistants were cut up pretty badly, but there were no fatalities. We have to pay the doctor anyway, whether we make use of him or not, so I may let you off on that score, but, of course, there will be a bill for the gin, and Carruthers here, says I am entitled to a new wharf."

Murvey's color came back to him slowly at first and then with a rush. His shoulders lifted and he came into the room a few steps with something of a swagger.

"A new wharf, eh?" There was no regret in his tone; no hint of an apology of even of mild anxiety for the welfare of those who had been injured. "A new wharf for that knock-kneed, ramshackle thing you had!"

Then to Carruthers sharply—

"You're going to O. K. a claim like that!"

"I don't know how bad the wharf looked before you smashed it," Carruthers said truthfully enough, and at once resenting

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Murvey's tone. "But I do know what it looks like now. What are you grousing about? You're lucky you didn't murder somebody."

"Seems to me," Morbright put in mildly, grounding a cigaret end in Kingdon's ash-receiver, "you're taking a rather belligerent stand for a man who has just made such a rotten mess of another fellow's property."

Murvey gulped. He was in an untenable position, and since the affair would not improve his record with the steamship company, his resentment toward Kingdon, aided and abetted by the recent memory of Kingdon's remark about his ship spoiling the appearance of the wharf, rose to a point where words meant nothing at all.

He did not attempt to argue the matter with the D. C. His eyes had a pale, fishy look, and it seemed to be rather difficult for him to breathe. Carruthers took a precautionary step in his direction.

"Don't get so ratty, Murvey," he cautioned heavily. "You haven't got a leg to stand on, and when a man's limping around on crutches, he ought to have sense enough to hang on to them. Better get back to your ship before Kingdon has a notion to take 'em away from you."

Then Murvey's tongue found words. And as usual, when Murvey found words suddenly like that, they were not nice words. In this instance, they threatened and condemned and relegated Kingdon and Marsden & Co. to several localities that were dark and overheated, and intimated a lurid contempt for the name of Justice. After which, still scattering vitriolic oratory all about him, he departed for the gig-wharf and the *Buwalla*.

"He has a delightful personality," Morbright said dryly as he and Carruthers prepared to leave.

"He's sour," Carruthers intimated with a grunt. "That's what's the matter with him. He's seen too many men go over his head, and that's as bad for the spleen as quinin and palm-oil chop."

Kingdon accepted this information in silence as he walked to the head of the stairs with his guests. But into his eager eyes there came a quiet, speculative look, and as he glanced out toward the river and the *Buwalla*, the look became more pronounced.

"The wharf was in pretty bad shape," he admitted so simply that Carruthers gasped, and Morbright looked at him from suddenly lowered brows. "I was just on the verge of putting up a new one. So perhaps we'd better figure up the gin breakage and let it go at that."

"What!"

"Of course, I can't prevent you from reporting it," Kingdon said quietly. "As Lloyds agent, I suppose that's your job?"

"Are you crazy?"

"And he'll have to jot it down in the ship's log, I imagine," Kingdon added thoughtfully.

"Listen to him, Morbright!" Carruthers demanded caustically. "Chucking good money——"

"But there's no need to rub it in," Kingdon finished as if Carruthers' horror were only to be expected. "I don't suppose his record is any too good as it is."

"Rub it in!" the A. P. A. man exclaimed impatiently. "After a man breaks up your wharf like that and then comes ashore and cusses you up and down your own office, you begin bothering about his feelings and his record! Murvey's!" Carruthers laughed derisively. "Why, when he finds out you've backed down about making the claim you ought to make, he'll spread the story all through these rivers that you're afraid of him!"

"Perhaps I am," Kingdon suggested with a slight and elusive smile.

"Besides, it's rotten business," Carruthers accused, paying no heed to Kingdon's attempt to sidestep. "And I hope your home office gives you ——. Why, if I ever tried to get sentimental like that, even with a skipper I liked——"

Carruthers solemnly pantomimed his finish through the medium of a good, swift kick, and, touching Morbright's arm, added abruptly:

"Come on. We can't have the judiciary corrupted with these turn-the-other-cheek notions of his, or you'll be going back to the consulate and unlocking the chain-gang."

Morbright laughed and followed the A. P. A. man down-stairs, but at the foot of the first short flight, he turned and looked back.

"I'd like to know how it works, if anything comes of it," he said quietly. "Let me know, will you?"

"Surely."

"I know how it'll work, all right," Carruthers growled. "Murvey'll wear hob-nailed boots the next time he comes into the

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river, and he'll dance on your face with them if he can. Chin chin."

Kingdon smiled and with a final nod of adieu to Morbright, walked along his veranda until he reached the river end of it. There, for a minute or two, he watched Murvey, in his gig, nearing the *Buwalla's* companion-ladder, and studied the wreck of the wharf with its excited cluster of muddy, near-naked, chattering natives, who were still hopefully searching for stray bottles of gin.

Then, with a slight shrug of his shoulders, Kingdon turned his back upon Murvey and the damage he had done, and paid a visit to Samuel Brown whose cheek had been attended to by Dr. Ramsay.

This was the second time in a very few months that Samuel had, without any assistance from fever, come under a doctor's care. The first time, the experience had left no visible trace behind it, but this time, Samuel was afraid it was going to be different. He was alone when Kingdon entered his room, and his face, generously swathed in bandages, was almost invisible. He did not look happy.

"Hurt much?" Kingdon asked without being too sympathetic.

"Not now, thanks. Stiff a little, that's all."

"Any stitches?"

"Seven."

Kingdon's eyebrows lifted and there was a short but painful pause.

"I thought it looked pretty bad. Don't you think you'd rest better lying down?"

"Oh, I'm not fagged enough for that." Then somewhat hesitatingly:

"Might I have a cigaret? I don't smoke as a rule, but I feel as if I'd like something—er—different to do."

Kingdon nodded, and went into Harth's room, which was nearest, and purloined a tin of cigarets he found on the table.

"These are Harth's," he announced, holding the open tin out to Samuel, and thereafter taking one himself. "Tell him I swiped them, will you?"

Samuel said he would, and they smoked for a minute or two in silence, while Kingdon studied his junior assistant's dull eyes and wondered what was troubling him, aside from loss of blood and shock.

"That bandage makes things pretty warm for you, doesn't it?"

Samuel confessed it did, indulged in a few amateurish puffs upon the cigaret without thinking about it, then looked directly at Kingdon suddenly and asked—

"Stitches—do they—is there always a scar?"

"Not always," Kingdon answered readily, and at once understood the dullness in Samuel's expression. "What did the doctor say?"

"He said he thought there wouldn't be much of a mark, but doctors are such dissemblers about thinks like that, it's impossible to believe anything they say."

"Oh, I don't think Ramsay would lie to you about it," Kingdon assured him, knowing perfectly well Ramsay would do just that. "If the cut were a clean one—not ragged, you know—it ought to heal up all right."

Samuel did not believe this either. His eyes said so, though he made no audible comment on the matter. And after a while he said as if he were just matter-of-factly trying to remember.

"Murvey? And the name of his ship is the *Buwalla?*"

"Yes," quietly. "But, of course, the whole thing was just a most unfortunate accident."

"Yes, yes, of course," Samuel agreed hurriedly, and seemed to want Kingdon to believe he meant it.

But Kingdon, who had had a previous experience with the rather peculiar psychology of Samuel Brown, concluded then and there that it would be just as well to keep an eye on Samuel, as well as Balloch, the next time the *Buwalla* came into the river.

IN SPITE of a story, previously related, that had to do with the accursed village of Ekaba and some rather startling and useful shooting on Samuel's part, Balloch's opinion of Samuel was still best expressed in silence, punctuated possibly by a significant shrug of the shoulders. Samuel, for his part, would have expressed the same opinion of Balloch, omitting the shrug.

But, in the succeeding few days even Balloch found his way to Samuel's room and tried to make himself believe the kernel clerk was not altogether beyond redemption; and Samuel succeeded in tolerating Balloch's doubtful overtures without inducing the big beach clerk to become profane.

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In these few days when he was alone, and particularly on the day when the bandage was finally removed, Samuel gave a fair representation of a newly captured animal in a cage; a quiet and well-nigh voiceless animal, it is true, but an unusually restless one.

On the morning when Dr. Ramsay removed the bandage, Harth was in the shop, Balloch was doing double duty on the beach and Kingdon carefully refrained from going into Samuel's room with the doctor. But when Ramsay came out again, Kingdon made a point of meeting him at the head of the stairs leading down to the beach.

"Everything all right, doctor?" he asked casually.

There was hesitation in Ramsay's face, and he played a tattoo with his knuckles on the veranda rail before he answered.

"I—er—I think he would feel better if he were left alone for a little while," he said guardedly.

"I see." Then, after a short pause. "Left quite a mark, did it?"

Ramsay's eyebrows rose, as if he thought Kingdon's intuition rather remarkable. The tattoo on the veranda rail stopped, then slowly began again as his glance drifted thoughtfully down toward the wharf where Balloch's Kroo-boys were rigging up a pile-driver—familiarly known as a "monkey"—which Kingdon had borrowed from Carruthers of the A. P. A.

"I don't think it is conceit," Ramsay said, turning his attention to Kingdon again. "It is something that goes a bit deeper than that. More the feel of the thing, possibly, than the look of it. And I'm afraid it will always show pretty badly. Better let him have a chance to get accustomed to it. I see you are losing no time about putting up a new wharf?"

Kingdon smiled and they talked for a minute or two on the difficulties of finding bottom in the greasy Niger mud, then the doctor departed, leaving Kingdon to wonder whether he should take his advice or not. Twice, the little agent started off in the direction of Samuel's room, and twice he paused and went back to his office.

Finally, the beach-bell that hung in the oil yard sounded four bells and put a period upon his indecision, bringing Harth and Balloch "on top" for a two hour recess and what was technically known as breakfast. And a little later, when he entered the saloon or dining-room, he found Harth and Balloch only too ready to join him.

The fourth chair at the foot of the table was still unoccupied.

Behind Kingdon's chair, the chief steward, solemn as any undertaker and much more solemn than most, folded his arms as usual and prepared himself to remain unmoving or unmoved until the meal was ended. The small-boy stewards grouped about the table began noiselessly to attend to their several duties of service, and Kingdon was helping himself to some canned lobster when he heard a door close sharply at the far end of the passage-way that separated Samuel's room from those of Balloch and Harth.

Then Kingdon, with fork and spoon hovering the fraction of a second over the service platter, heard a step that came nearer and nearer to the saloon—a step that began to come forward firmly enough at first, hesitated, came on a little way, then paused again.

Kingdon helped himself to the lobster, turned to the boy who served it and said quite audibly:

"Serve Mr. Brown. He come in one time."

The step in the hall jerked suddenly forward—almost hurried—and Samuel came in.

Even the chief steward so far forgot himself as to unfold his arms. The boy with the lobster platter, standing behind Samuel's chair, almost dropped it. Harth, who faced the passage-way, smothered an exclamation and smiled the ghastliest smile Balloch, seated opposite, had ever seen.

Kingdon looked up and was glad he had talked to Dr. Ramsay first.

The scar was plain enough; a jagged, dark blue line that cleft Samuel's cheek not unlike a pictorial representation of a streak of lightning. But it was his expression and his manner that staggered Kingdon and the others most.

His eyes had no life in them. His mouth was tightly compressed, his head was held stiffly erect, and his shoulders and arms and legs gave an uncanny impression of paralysis that might have suggested to an imaginative mind that the lightning-like appearance of the scar had more than just a symbolical significance.

"I am sorry I am late, Mr. Kingdon," he apologized, in his customary, punctilious way, though his voice was as lifeless as his

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eyes. "May I still be permitted to join you?"

And while he waited for Kingdon's reply, his right hand moved impulsively toward his cheek, stopped midway and dropped to his side again.

"Surely. Glad to see you back again."

Samuel inclined his head in acknowledgment and walked to his chair; and as he sat down he looked directly at Harth and Balloch and gravely admitted their existence with a nod.

And because Kingdon knew that courage was largely a matter of the point of view from which a thing was done, he also knew that Samuel Brown would probably never do anything that would be quite as courageous as this simple and altogether inconsequent resumption of his place at table.

KINGDON'S report to Marsden & Co.'s Liverpool office on the *Buwalla's* collision with the wharf did not advise that any claim be made for destruction of property. By the simple process of saying as little about it as possible, Kingdon did what he could to make the home office viewpoint concide with his own. And after several letters of diminishing importance had passed back and forth, the matter drifted into the files and, officially at least, was forgotten.

Samuel Brown, however, did not forget, and Kingdon did not expect him to. In the several months that followed, while the new wharf grew and spread itself out over a considerably greater area than the old, Samuel gave Kingdon the impression that he was simply marking time until the *Buwalla* would return.

And daily, whether Samuel was aware of it or not, the man who had been Samuel, began to look like Sam.

Even Balloch noticed this. There was nothing specific about it; nothing on which Kingdon, who watched with that quiet, unobtrusive interest that was characteristic of him, could place his finger. But the word that probably covered it best was humility.

Plainly, at first, the lightning-like blue streak that ran down his cheek, made him cringe. And, as if he thought the higher he held his head the plainer the scar would show, he subconsciously acquired a habit of bending the neck a little and of looking more or less steadily in the direction of his feet.

This deprived him of the greater part of his attitude of superiority, and when, after a month or so, this phase gradually passed, and Samuel lifted his head again and looked men straight in the eyes, the look in his eyes was one of somewhat rough defiance rather than of contempt.

His manner of speech, too, became less studied, more abrupt, with a staccato quality in it that startled Balloch more than once. He was plainly at war with himself and the world, but always, when he showed this just a little too plainly to either Kingdon, Harth or Balloch, his demeanor immediately thereafter became quietly apologetic, and he would retire into a state of humble silence, out of which he would emerge just a little less disagreeable than before.

Before the *Buwalla* and Captain Murvey returned to Warri, Samuel looked very much less like a floor-walker and very much more like the kernel clerk he was supposed to be. A touch of fever, the daily dose of quinin, the swelter of the grind in the kernel store, the dragging loneliness of the nights, and the black, sleepless hours when he was altogether alone with the livid symbol of something approximating a curse on his cheek—these things were entering into the soul of Samuel Brown and slowly but surely making of him a normal, sociable human being.

If he still thought that Balloch's intelligence was crude, he no longer even looked as if he did. If, in the lonely dark, he whined, no one heard him. Harth, whose room was nearest, sometimes heard a restless step that still paced up and down, but Harth, who knew that men were not "made over" overnight, did not intrude or interfere in any way. The fight, by virtue of the very nature of it, was Samuel's own. No one referred to it, and no one said anything about the scar.

So that Samuel had no possible means of knowing that Balloch, in his secret heart, envied him. In fact, Balloch would have given several months' pay to have been able to go home to Paisley Road, Glasgow, with a mark of honor like that upon his cheek!

ERE the *Buwalla* came back to Warri, there was no further need for Balloch to ship kernels or palm oil by surf-boat, or to receive cargo in like manner. The new wharf was ready to receive any kind of visitor.

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Bills of lading advised Kingdon in advance that the *Buwalla* had several thousand cases of trade gin on board for him, and Samuel's kernel book confirmed Kingdon's rough guess that the small mountain of kernels on hand totaled rather more than one hundred tons.

Therefore, on the morning when the *Buwalla's* screaming anchor-chain called Kingdon away from indenting to step out on to his veranda, and he saw the old, black-hulled gin-tank coming to anchor in mid-stream, he returned to his office and immediately penned a polite invitation to Captain Murvey to bring his ship alongside the wharf as there were one hundred and twenty tons of kernels to be shipped.

Then Kingdon sent for Balloch.

"The *Buwalla* has five thousand cases on board for us, and I'm going to ship our kernel stock. She'll be alongside the wharf this forenoon, I imagine."

Balloch nodded more surlily than he knew. Taking gin off the *Buwalla* was unavoidable if it were on board to take, but giving Murvey a shipment of kernels, with Parkes of the *Owassa* only a week or ten days away, was wholly unnecessary; at least, the big beach clerk's expression said it was.

"That'll be a two-day job," he suggested, as if he hoped that the prospect of having the *Buwalla* alongside the wharf for two days might make Kingdon change his mind.

"I imagine so. Take off the gin today and ship the kernels tomorrow, and get the usual extra boys if you need them."

Balloch grunted, and Kingdon added mildly—

"And strictly between ourselves, I'd like you to see to it that Brown doesn't get into trouble while the *Buwalla* is here."

"Me?" Balloch looked startled, largely because he did not understand what Kingdon meant.

"I'm afraid Brown doesn't like the *Buwalla* any better than you do," Kingdon explained simply. "You are the beach clerk. It's your job to see to it that the peace of the beach is kept. That may or may not involve Brown, but I'm putting it up to you to see that it doesn't."

Balloch had no difficulty in understanding this. It told him not only to keep his own hands carefully at his sides, but also to see to it that Samuel did likewise. Consequently, Samuel at once became more interesting to Balloch than even his shooting at Ekaba or the scar on his cheek had succeeded in making him.

So it was not surprizing, when Balloch found his way down to the beach again, that he found it convenient to drop into the kernel store, the receiving end of which faced the back of the beach.

"Doing much?" he asked unnecessarily, since the desultory character of the morning's business was plain to any beholder.

"Not a great deal," Samuel returned companionably enough, from the elevation of his high stool. "Thursdays, for some reason or other, are always slow."

Balloch nodded.

"Seen the *Buwalla?* She's just come up river," he announced as if she had no more significance than any other ship.

Samuel was scribbling aimlessly on a small desk-pad and his pencil trailed a little after Balloch spoke, then stopped. He said something gruffly to one of his kernel boys, who, for some reason seemed to annoy him just at that moment, then he turned his attention leisurely to Balloch again.

"No. I didn't see her. Heard an anchor-chain go, but didn't bother to look. Has she anything for us?"

"Five thousand gin. And we're going to get rid of your kernel stock. How much is it?"

"Hundred and twenty—" getting down from his stool abruptly and walking toward the side door of the store. "She'll have to come alongside for that, won't she?"

"The boss says she'll probably tie up this morning," Balloch admitted sourly. "She's a sweet young thing to have hugging a brand new wharf for two whole days."

Samuel went only half-way to the side-door then turned and came back.

"Two days, eh?" drawlingly. "You don't like Murvey very much, do you? Murvey? That's his name, isn't it?"

"That's it," Balloch grunted. "Nobody likes him."

"No?" Samuel seemed genuinely interested, and from the point of view of a man who has no ax to grind in the matter. "Why is that? Disagreeable—is he?"

"And mean and ugly," Balloch added. "And his officers and crew are no better. Just wharf rats."

Samuel nodded absently.

"Thought they looked rather perpetually unwashed the last time they were here. When do we start shipping?"

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And he waved his hand toward the large brown heap of kernels behind the cooler measures.

"Tomorrow for that—" watching Samuel shrewdly, but unable to detect anything in his manner that betrayed an anxiety to meet Murvey again. "But you'll have to keep an eye on the gin on the wharf when we start moving it to the store."

"Oh—" indifferently. "All right. Let me know, will you?"

Balloch said he would, and finding that he had nothing more to say, departed reluctantly for the oil yard, no better informed than he had been before.

Samuel climbed slowly upon his high stool and sat fiddling with pencil and pad again. But the motions of the pencil were short and nervous, and presently Samuel put if from him and began to walk back and forth between the desk and the side-door. He did not, however, go beyond the door-sill to get a glimpse of the *Buwalla*. Now that she was actually in the river, he seemed to be afraid to see her or her master a moment sooner than was necessary.

Occasionally his hand went up to his face, lingered there a second or two, then came away again, and every time he did this an onlooker might have been aware of a certain stiffening of the arm as it fell to his side again, while the fingers spread and curved and clenched as if he were trying to take a firmer grip upon himself, but did not succeed in doing so for long.

One of his kernel boys, a diminutive Sobo, taking advantage of his abstraction, perpetrated the time-worn trick of going into partnership with a convenient bushel trader for the purpose of selling the same two bushels twice. This was done by carefully omitting to dump the purchased kernels into stock; but when the kernel boy became greedy in his success and tried it a third time, Samuel suddenly woke up.

The kernel boy saw the wholly unexpected and most unusual expression in his eyes first and did not pause. The trader, a scrawny Sobo of the kernel boy's own breed, was slower, but he almost reached the breakwater before Samuel's surprizingly accurate right toe caught up with him. He finished his journey to the muddy little side-creek much more precipitately even than he had intended, but Samuel did not follow him into the mud.

Several feet away from the breakwater, he stopped short, turned abruptly about and walked back to his desk in the kernel store and leaned against it, breathing somewhat deeply and wearing an odd expression that suggested he was afraid his customary composure would never come back to him.

Obviously he did not like to lose his temper in that fashion, and for the remainder of the morning, while the *Buwalla* came alongside the wharf, and with the rattle of her donkey-engine in his ears, Samuel Brown stood face to face with himself and was astonished.

When the eleven o'clock bell rang, he closed the store and went "on top" as usual, casting but a perfunctory glance in the *Buwalla's* direction as he passed up-stairs. And at one o'clock, when he went down to the beach again, he did not look toward the wharf at all, in spite of the fact that Balloch had said grumblingly at table that Murvey's officers and crew seemed to be spoiling for a fight. Apparently, according to Balloch's version of it, their remarks on the subject of the new wharf were neither complimentary nor funny.

If this information were intended as a hint to Kingdon to let down the bars of restraint, Kingdon did not take it. He just nodded and waited for Murvey, who had been invisible most of the morning, to come ashore.

And in mid-afternoon Kingdon saw the skipper clambering down the rope ladder to the wharf; saw him pass Balloch with his customary disregard for the big beach clerk's existence, and then heard him come step by step up-stairs.

There was no hesitancy about Murvey's manner. Kingdon could have told this from the sound of the steadily climbing footstep on the stairs, and when Murvey darkened the little agent's doorway, Kingdon understood he was expected to feel that a favor was being conferred upon him.

"Hello, Kingdon," with an astonishing expression of patronizing importance. "Still on deck, eh? I heard a rumor around the rivers that your home office had chucked you out. That wharf palaver, you know? Funny how these stories get around, isn't it?"

He laughed, strutted into the room toward the couch, and made himself comfortable.

"I won't refuse a drink if you offer me one?"

Kingdon actually looked frightened, and

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when he called a steward and ordered drinks, Murvey seemed to find the proceeding rather amusing. He grinned contentedly and asked:

"Thought twice about that wharf claim, didn't you? Hunh! I thought you would. I'm a good friend to my friends, Kingdon, but I'm —— on the fellahs I don't like, and I'm glad you found it out before you made one mistake too many. Who gave you the tip?"

Kingdon smiled.

"Oh, nobody in particular," he said almost diffidently.

"I was just curious, that's all," Murvey went on largely. "But it's all right now. So long as we understand each other, there's no harm done, and I'll take that hundred and twenty ton as a peace offering and call it square."

Then he added graciously:

"You're all right, Kingdon, and I'm not going to be a hog, either. Parkes of the *Owassa* can have his share—" he grinned up at the Kroo-boy steward who entered with the drinks— "if I don't happen to need it."

Kingdon laughed too.

"Well, I'm glad that's settled," he said, taking a glass of lime-juice from the steward's tray. "I've been worrying quite a lot about you."

This seemed to amuse Murvey so much that he almost choked with laughter, and spilled a considerable quantity of his brandy and soda on one of Kingdon's most colorful native mats.

"Lyin' awake at nights, eh?" he exploded, and guffawed a little more. This was, quite evidently, too good to be kept to himself.

"A little," Kingdon said simply, and drank some lime-juice. "Carruthers of the A.P.A. told me you'd wear hobnailed boots and walk all over my face when you came back. And I didn't think I'd like that. But you didn't wear them after all, did you?"

Murvey began to laugh again, then stopped quite abruptly. His eyes narrowed.

"Carruthers—eh?"

"Yes. And as I'd never seen a rat wearing hobnailed boots, I was rather curious to see what it would look like."

"Eh?"

Murvey sat bolt upright with a suddenness that jarred some more of his brandy and soda to the mat.

"What's that?"

"Perhaps I'm insulting the rat," Kingdon declared so simply and so casually, and yet so staggeringly, that Murvey paid more attention to the words than he did to the flame that gleamed suddenly in Kingdon's quiet dark eyes.

"What the —— do you mean? Why you undersized——"

Murvey paused there, not because Kingdon put his glass down and rose to his feet, but simply because he caught the look in Kingdon's eyes. And he found himself waiting for Kingdon to speak, wondering vaguely wherein he had made a mistake.

"It's always been a theory of mine, Murvey, that even a swine like you, has a spark of good in him somewhere, and that a little Christian charity will usually find it and sort of light it up again. But I'm afraid you're the exception that proves the rule. That's all."

"What's that!"

Murvey repeated the words blankly. He looked as if everything had suddenly gone all wrong.

"You are probably the worst mistake I ever made," Kingdon admitted frankly. "And I'll have to apologize to Carruthers the next time I see him, and hide my diminished head when Morbright, the D.C., begins asking questions about you."

"About me? Morbright? What's he——"

Murvey rose, strode over to Kingdon's desk and leaned across it as if he were trying to stare him out of countenance and at the same time get his bearings and find out what had happened to alter things so suddenly.

"What are you gettin' at? What's Morbright got to do with this? He's got nothing on me."

"He's interested in you, that's all," Kingdon said calmly. "You're a sort of Exhibit A—a study in brute psychology, as it were—and you don't exhibit very well."

"I don't, eh?"

"I'll let you have those kernels because I said I would, but after this, you'll learn to say 'please,'" Kingdon informed him imperturbably. "Now, finish your drink and toddle."

Nothing could well have been more contemptuous, more finished, than this, and Murvey's expression would have been funny if it had not been so murderous.

Kingdon, who was ever for peace, chose to laugh outright at it, and though Murvey did not know it, it would have been plain

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to Harth, who understood the little man probably better than any one else, that, for once at least, Kingdon actually resented his physical incapacity for kicking a visitor down-stairs.

The laugh, however, had much the same effect, and, what was still worse, he followed it around the corner of his desk so that the skipper of the *Buwalla* could not possibly receive the impression that Kingdon found a barricade of any sort necessary when he wanted to laugh like that.

Murvey's face suddenly lengthened. Speechless with rage one moment, he was utterly at sea the next, and he began to back toward the door principally because there did not seem to be anything else for him to do.

He saw that Kingdon was not in the least afraid of him and this, in view of what he had thought, startled and puzzled him so much, he concluded that it would probably be best to think it over. Something had gone wrong with his calculations somewhere, and perhaps——

"Get out!"

"All—all right. That's all right. You—you're mistaken, that's all. That's it, Kingdon. Mistaken. Thought you understood me, this trip, but—it's all right. Better luck next time."

There was nothing important about the man who went out of Kingdon's office, walking backwards, and the man who clumped down-stairs, muttering to himself, was still whirling around in mental circles, and not being very particular where he was going when he collided with a Kroo-boy, *en route* to the gin store from the wharf, who had two cases of gin on his shoulder.

The Kroo-boy managed to keep the gin on his shoulder, and Murvey was none the worse of the encounter, but he swore at the boy and cuffed him for all that. The boy still preserved the gin intact, retreating soundlessly from the weight of Murvey's fist, after the stoical manner of his kind. Then Murvey heard a somewhat hurried footstep behind him, and a quiet voice said distinctly:

"Let him alone. It was your own fault."

MURVEY spun about and found himself looking into the face of a pale, tight-mouthed, cold, blue-eyed man who had a livid scar on one cheek. The scar was very prominent just then, and Murvey saw it even before he recognized the man.

"Oh, it's you, is it? And who asked your opinion? Ruddy puppy like you talking to me like that. Give me any more of your jaw and I'll mark the other side of your face for you!"

Samuel stiffened so sharply that Murvey at once placed himself in an attitude of defense.

"Come on," he taunted, "if you want it that bad. I'm just in the mood to lick the tar out of one of you fellahs."

There were appropriate expletives mixed with this to give it color and verve, and Murvey's face sneered at Samuel Brown through a mist that was dotted vaguely with other faces—all of them black. Then the mist became black, too. Every nerve and sinew in Samuel's body screeched with a thousand variant voices, drowning all other sounds, and he leaped toward Murvey as a caged animal leaps toward freedom.

Murvey grinned. This was going to be easy. He threw out his left arm carelessly, brushed Samuel's flailing fists aside, and took all the time he wanted to cross the right to Samuel's jaw.

Samuel stopped, rocked on his heels as if he were going to fall backward, then leaned the other way, bending his head with a suddenness that was wholly unintentional as far as avoiding Murvey's too sure and too long delayed finishing left was concerned. The blow struck the top of Samuel's partially dislodged sun helmet, knocking it off altogether, and as a result of his fist's contact with a too easily movable body, Murvey was carried just a little off his balance, and into Samuel's arms.

The feel of the large thickset body so near to his helped Samuel to clear the buzzing in his head. His arms wrapped themselves about Murvey in a frenzy, his right leg whipped itself around Murvey's left on the inside, and with a heave of his shoulder that was expressive of his extreme displeasure and disgust, he flung the skipper from him.

Altogether surprized at the simplicity of the thing, Murvey reeled back a step or two, lost his footing on the greasy *chic-coco*, then sat down hard.

A far-off sound of laughter came to Samuel's ears, and he shook his head to see a little better; not the natives, but Murvey, who had gone down much harder than a

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man of his weight could well afford to.

"Get up!"

Samuel's voice sounded hard and dry, and there was no mistaking his intention to continue. Also, his arms assumed a more careful pose, as if, out of the fog that surrounded him, he had drawn the memory of what little he might possibly have learned of the rudiments of self-defense. There was little of passion in his face now. He scarcely felt or heard; just watched Murvey every second and waited for him to get up.

There was a rushing approach of naked feet from all sides, and in the midst of this, a faint suggestion of white men's boots. There was also a great clamoring of voices that seemed to move around in a circle.

But not a hint of interference. Murvey was just a little surprized at this. Samuel did not think about it; not then.

The skipper came warily upward, crouching and circling away, then rushed suddenly and savagely forward, with the very evident intention of finishing the business as quickly and completely as possible, and of making no mistake this time. But Samuel blocked Murvey's first swing, managed to slip inside the blow, and drove his right and left with bone-cracking force into Murvey's all too confident face.

The *Buwalla's* skipper paused. Instinctively he covered up and took his time. This was not going to be so easy. And when Samuel leaped at him, slipped an upper-cut under his guard, then rammed a straight left into the midst of his face and his confusion, Murvey covered up still more carefully, heard the native huzzas that greeted Samuel's success, and realized that it was time to stop fooling and to begin fighting in real earnest.

Therefore Murvey took still more time and circled warily. At once, it was evident that he had wakened up to what was expected of him; also that he knew a great deal more about boxing than Samuel did. Samuel's blows had hurt and enraged, but they had apparently done little harm, and for a minute perhaps, the *Buwalla's* skipper moved around Samuel very carefully, feinting the kernel clerk into unprofitable leads, giving him opportunities to strike, and seeing to it that he didn't; and generally, without any very material damage to himself, tried to find out just how much, or little, Samuel knew.

Then Murvey began to talk to Samuel. What he said was not clever; merely insulting and often obscene. After which, more sure of himself than ever, he proceeded to "mark Samuel up." He did not knock the kernel clerk down; just tried to mark him and keep him on his feet so that the marking process would continue until he got tired of it. Then he would put Samuel to sleep.

Occasionally, Samuel succeeded in reaching Murvey, and every time he did, it was seen that Murvey had to cover up for a few seconds to recover from the effects of the blow. It did not seem to occur to Murvey, however, that these blows were not getting any lighter, but one of them, flush on the nose, made him more angry than he wanted to get get just then, and suddenly, Samuel went down.

"This is no fight! He'll kill him!"

The voice was Balloch's, and his face was white with an unhappy eagerness to take up the battle where Samuel had momentarily laid it down. There was no color in Harth's face either. He stood beside Balloch at the foot of the stairs leading up to the living-quarters, and he was gripping one of the stairway uprights with a hand that looked huge enough to shake the whole building.

The shop was closed. There was no more gin being passed from wharf to gin store. Everything had stopped dead in its tracks to watch Captain Murvey of the *Buwalla* give Samuel Brown a thrashing.

Kingdon, also, was standing at the foot of the stairs.

More than this, he kept a restraining hand on Balloch's arm, and looking quietly on, said nothing and offered Samuel no advice. Neither did he make the slightest move to interfere, either on Samuel's behalf or on behalf of peace.

This was more than amazing. It was cataclysmic. Yet nothing could have been more expressive of Kingdon's control over his assistants, than the sight of Balloch and Harth standing idly by while Murvey—"Scurvy" Murvey of the *Buwalla*—thrashed a Marsden man.

The *Buwalla's* chief officer, a great, hairy-armed man in a tattered singlet and a pair of duck trousers that looked as if they would never be white again, stood not far from where Samuel had fallen. The second officer was a little behind him; and Kingdon watched these two even more carefully than he did Balloch.

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He did not want Samuel interfered with by any one. Not now. Because this was Samuel's fight; a thing he had to purge from his system like a poison. He would work better and sleep better after it, and a man must do both of these thoroughly if his life in the tropics is to be a profitable thing.

Samuel stayed down quite a while, but it was evident that, when he was ready, he would get up again. His face was crimson-smeared and his breath came hardly, but there was still one absorbing thought in his head. And just one.

He must beat Murvey. He must do this if it took all night.

The look, and particularly the feel of the scar had been telling him this for a long time. If Murvey, who had insulted him the first time he had met him, had apologized for his careless seamanship when he had smashed the wharf, it might have been different. But Murvey had not apologized. He had threatened to mark the other cheek!

So Samuel Brown rose carefully and calmly to his feet to beat Murvey.

The skipper might hit him many times and knock him down again and again, but he would always get up. He was sure of this, because it had to be. And with an utter disregard for Murvey's fists and weight and conversation, he sprang straight at him, took a hurried, glancing blow on the side of the head, another in the region of the kidneys and yet another that gave him an odd sensation that Murvey's fist had been left sticking to his left eye. Then, because there were apparently no more fists in the way, he drove his right and left straight ahead—the left to the face, the right, as far as he could send it, into Murvey's mid-section.

Balloch shouted something about "the spot," some one else groaned, and Murvey grunted and covered up. Samuel's right and left paid no attention to any of these things. They punched at Murvey's body and they punched at his head until Murvey, ducking out of danger, crouched and rushed with all the fury of a pain-maddened bull, and Samuel went down again.

Murvey leaned over him, his eyes black with passion.

"Get up, you swine! Get up! I've only started on you!"

Samuel shook his head to clear it and found he had only one eye that was of any use to him. But he got up, only to be almost immediately knocked down.

This happened twice and then a third time. And each time Murvey stood over Samuel and cursed him fluently and invited him to get up.

Still Kingdon kept a restraining hand on Balloch's arm.

"Stand back, Murvey!" Harth warned suddenly, as Murvey, in his rage, seemed ready to employ his feet in Samuel's ribs.

"Get up, —— you!" Murvey screamed, ignoring Harth altogether. "Get up! or I'll break you up!"

"Stand back!"

Harth sprang away from the stairs and Kingdon made no effort to stop him; and simultaneously the *Buwalla's* chief officer lumbered forward.

Kingdon's grip on Balloch's sleeve suddenly fell away.

But just as it looked as if Samuel's intention to beat Murvey was going to be seriously interfered with, Samuel did a most unexpected thing. He looked straight up at Murvey out of his one good eye and said thickly:

"If you use your feet—I won't just beat you. I'll kill you."

"Eh? What the ——"

And Samuel completed the unexpected thing by suddenly leaping to his feet.

Harth and the *Buwalla's* chief officer and even Balloch stopped short. Murvey, taken off his mental balance for a second or two, tried to side-step and then to lean into Samuel to smother his sudden burst of savagery with body blows.

But if there were anything that could have smothered Samuel Brown then, Murvey did not have it. Even his chief officer saw this and wondered if Marsden's kernel clerk had, all at once, gone mad. As if to oblige Murvey, he leaned in as close as the skipper could well desire, and then——

Right, left, right, left, right!

Swiftly and terribly Samuel's forearms moved back and forth and seemed to bury themselves deeper and deeper into the middle of Murvey's fat. And this time, the skipper did not straighten. He "folded up" or tried to, but Samuel, wrenching himself free from an attempted clinch, simply began upon the face he disliked so much.

Right, left, right, left, right!

Blows that crunched their way through every resistance; a raining fury of them to which there seemed to be no end. Murvey tottered, tried to protect his face and to

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dodge this way and that. But Samuel followed him, still moving his arms like well-oiled piston rods. And, though he did not seem to care where he hit Murvey now, it was nevertheless plain that, every time Samuel's right or left drove forward, there was the force of a battering ram behind it.

There was an unreality about the whole business that made both black and white gape—the *Buwalla's* chief officer particularly. He saw his skipper staggering this way and that, saw him several times try to straighten up, then realized from the agonized look on his face that he could not straighten. And Samuel's arms, apparently as tireless as they were unrelenting, moved back and forth endlessly, as if they had every intention of doing so until Murvey was no longer there to hit.

Right, left, right, left, right!

And the right was the last, straight and deep into the skipper's vitals. Murvey's knees bent under him slowly and he flung forward and rolled over on his back, looking glassily up at Samuel Brown.

And Samuel, dropping his arms as if he could no longer support them, reeled drunkenly from side to side. His head rolled a little, his shoulders drooped, but he still managed to keep his feet.

"Down!" he muttered thickly. "You're—down! And if you—you get up—I'll knock you—down—again and—again—and again! As often as you—get up—I'll beat you—into—the ground. Understand?"

Murvey had nothing to say. He could not even whisper the oath that was in his heart; meaning that he was very sick and very much more afraid. And when his chief officer came slouching forward to assist him to his feet, even this fearsome individual had nothing to say to Samuel.

All about them, too, was silence, and there was no cheering, even from the Krooboys, then or later.

Harth and Balloch came and lingered, without comment, at Samuel's elbow, while Murvey's officers helped him to get back to his ship.

And when, after a minute or two, they looked around for Kingdon, they found he had slipped quietly up-stairs.

SEVERAL days later, as the *Buwalla* was creeping out of the river as if she were trying to be as inconspicuous as possible, Morbright, the D. C., came along for some shirts and took the opportunity to go up to Kingdon's office.

From the veranda they observed the *Buwalla's* departure, and Morbright said reminiscently—

"It did not work very well, did it?"

Kingdon knew perfectly well what he meant, and chancing to look down toward the breakwater, saw Samuel Brown and Balloch discussing the feasibility of purchasing two baby crocodiles which, with their snouts tied up, were being offered for sale by a "bushy" looking native in a loincloth. Kingdon also observed that they were paying no heed whatever to the departure of the *Buwalla*.

"Oddly enough, I think it did," he said to Morbright, after a second or two. "In fact—" with a slight smile and another glance in Samuel's direction— "I'm sure of it."

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WHERE THE TRAIL ENDED

by Clements Ripley

Author of "An Unpleasant Episode."

THEY turned "Spike" Meeghan loose, turned him loose with a cold sweat of terror on him, a terror that gripped him and shook him and turned him deathly sick at the pit of his stomach.

It wasn't death itself that he feared. No one had a better reputation for being able to take care of himself in a jam, where automatics crackled suddenly and spitefully in the dark and streaks of flame leaped swiftly from unsuspected places. A man who fears this sort of thing will do well to keep out of the bootlegging game, and of the hard-visaged young men who bring the trucks through from Canada Spike Meeghan had not been the least.

It was another sort of death Spike Meeghan feared, a death in a small gray room with its one furnishing a heavy wooden chair hung with straps and wires. And it was this fear that gripped him and fastened on him and grew until he told the District Attorney that he would testify, testify to anything, against anybody in exchange for his life.

So they turned him loose one hour before the verdict, with his pockets full of cash and his heart full of terror, a terror that stayed with him to the train and rode the cushions with him as he traveled. Slumped down in his seat, his face gray with the horror of it, he let his mind run back to the scene in the courtroom, where "Red" Dacey and Tony Spinelli and "Izzy" Feinmark would even now be standing to hear the words that would send them to the chair.

They'd go to the chair, there wasn't any doubt about that. His evidence would send them there. They'd be led into that room one at a time, and when they came out they'd put them in the dead cart and carry them away; just so much dead meat—like the stuff you see in butcher-shops.

Then a voice broke in on his ecstasy of horror, and all it said was:

"Dinner is now served in the dining-car. Dining-car is in the rear."

And Spike Meeghan came to himself and remembered that he was free, with ten thousand dollars in the lining of his coat, the proceeds of the last truck-load of contraband liquor, and that it was Red and Tony and Izzy and not himself who were going to the chair, and above all that he was hungry.

In the washroom he brushed his well-cut clothes with meticulous care, sleeked back his black hair, polished his neat Oxfords with a towel and was himself again. Then he went in to dinner and sat next a cigar salesman, with whom he agreed that this here prohibition was a joke, and to whom he afterward proved it with his pocket flask.

Then he climbed into his berth, braced his back against the pillows, grateful after his cell in the Tombs, and planned his campaign.

Obviously it wouldn't do to go back to the Canadian border. The first bootlegger

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he met would croak him for a squealer. On the other hand there was the Mexican end, where the game would probably not be as highly systematized and operating expenses would undoubtedly be lighter. He could pick up a partner there too, some hick who would drive the truck and who could be left to hold the sack in case of trouble. The thing to do, he decided, was to pick out some small town in the neighborhood of El Paso. The latter would do as a distributing center, and the former as a base of operations.

His thin lips flattened in a smile as he reached for the light-switch. Red and Tony and Izzy were a bunch of boobs, and he, Spike Meeghan, was a smooth worker.

"A guy has to look out for himself these days," he remarked as he settled back in the dark. "And believe me," he added, "I'm just the guy to do it."

IF YOU follow the Rio Grande some forty miles southeast from El Paso you come upon Varracaville. You will know it by the name, painted in white letters on the red railway station. Otherwise it might be any of a hundred or so small towns at which you glance superciliously from the windows of your Pullman.

It has the usual single dirt street, bounded by frame and 'dobe buildings, and the inevitable brick-front store outside of which are parked the customary collection of patient, moth-eaten ponies and disreputable flivvers. On every side is the desert, stark desolation, its horizon broken only by an occasional writhing tower of sand, a "twister" in the local parlance, where a wind trying to get out of Mexico meets one trying to get in. It has the usual collection of station loafers, whose excuse for being seems to be to see the train come in.

It is not often that the train stops at Varracaville for anything but mail, and still less often that it disgorges slender, well-groomed young men stamped with the unmistakable stamp of the metropolis.

Varracaville took in Spike Meeghan from his well-made golfing-cap to his neatly polished Oxfords. It missed no visible detail of his silk shirt. It gazed on his gold cigaret-case. Then it ruminated silently, spat, and went about its several concerns.

Spike Meeghan returned stare for stare unabashed. Then as the group began to drift away he singled out one, a battered, worn-looking individual, who shifted his quid and gazed keenly from under his hat-brim with a pair of frosty blue eyes.

"Say, brother," asked Spike, "which way to the hotel?"

The other, leaning negligently against a baggage-truck, one thumb hooked in an arm-hole of his unbuttoned waistcoat, gazed into space as if in deep cogitation.

"There ain't none," he drawled at length.

Meeghan cursed bitterly, while the other listened in critical approval.

"This is a —— of a dump," Meeghan wound up at length.

"I wouldn't go so fur as to say that if I was you," remonstrated the older man gently when he had finished. "It's a right nice town when you get to know it. Although I don't hold with towns much, myself," he added as an afterthought.

"But where am I going to sleep?" complained Spike. "I gotta doss down somewheres, ain't I?"

The other stepped away from the baggage-truck and extended his hand.

"My name's McManus," he said with a certain quiet courtesy; "Luke McManus, and I'd take it right friendly if you was to come home with me. I've got a house a little piece down the road, and there'll be a mess o' beans cooking right now."

Meeghan took the proferred hand, but his eyes narrowed. In his world people who took in casual strangers usually had a reason. The open hospitality of the old West where a stranger was made welcome without question was new to his experience. It is a hospitality which is fast dying out, but which survives wherever an old desert man is found.

McManus noted his hesitation, but put it down to a different motive.

"Come on," he urged. "Beans is cooking and there'll be a-plenty for one and all."

"How much?" queried Meeghan cautiously.

"Oh, a-plenty," answered the old man, still mistaking his meaning. "Don't you fret about that. We won't run short."

"How much jack? How much money? What's your rates?"

At last McManus got it. He stopped short, and his frosty blue eyes widened under the heavy brows. He turned squarely toward Meeghan.

"You being a stranger," he said slowly, "it might be you made a mistake. I'll take

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it you did. When I ask a man to light and bait with me I don't aim to make him no charge. I don't run no hotel. Such as we got, you're welcome to it if you've a mind."

It was Spike's turn to be surprized, but there was something in the old desert man's eyes that led him to cover it.

"My mistake, brother," he apologized. "Lead on to the eats and you won't hear no growl outa me."

THIS was a hick sure enough, he decided as the old man strode ahead of him. He took in the battered felt hat, the overalls, stagged off half-way to the knee, and the old single-action Colt that swung at McManus' hip. This last made him feel instinctively for his side pocket where his own snub-nosed automatic nestled flat against him. This was a hick sure enough. A guy with a head on him needn't starve in this place.

He was still turning it over in his mind when McManus stopped at a 'dobe shack and threw open the door.

"Here we are," he said jovially as the stranger entered. "Smell the beans? Oh, Mary!"

There was a sudden clatter of dishes in the next room, and a door opened. A girl stood on the threshold, a slender wisp of a thing, her yellow hair falling in disarray about her delicate, flushed face.

Meghan's hands automatically went to his tie. Then he glanced at his well-manicured nails, pulled down his silk cuffs and stepped forward as McManus made the introduction.

"Mary," he said, "this here's Mr. Meeghan."

"Pleased ta meetcha," responded Spike.

The girl giggled and pushed her hair out of her eye with a hand which still held an enormous spoon. She was pretty in a foolish, slack way, with big, wide-open blue eyes and a small red mouth, with a discontented droop at the corners.

"Mr. Meeghan's from New York," announced the older man importantly.

He had been at pains to find this out while they walked up from the station.

"Honest?"

"Surest thing you know," affirmed Spike. "Ever been there?"

"Me?" she asked scornfully with a shrug of her shoulders. "I don't ever get to go nowheres."

"'S a great little town. Y' ought to get your old man—" with a nod at McManus—"to take you there."

"My old man—" she giggled, and Mcmanus broke in.

"I ain't her father," he explained with a laugh. "Mary and me's married. Heap of folks makes that mistake when they first sees us. I'm sixty-four and still going strong, and Mary here's just——"

"You shut up," she admonished him, and with a toss of her head and a backward glance at Meeghan she retreated into the kitchen and slammed the door.

Meeghan caught the glance and the message it contained, and decided that he had come to the right place. When it came to the dolls he flattered himself that he had as much on the ball as the next guy.

During supper, however, he forebore to cast even a glance at Mary, although it was plain to see that this behavior was neither expected nor cared for. It was obvious that he had made an impression, and Mary for her part took no pains to hide it.

Meanwhile old Luke McManus shoveled in beans, gulped coffee and kept up a continuous flow of conversation, utterly unconscious of the domestic drama whose first act was being played out under his eyes. It was not every day that he was privileged to entertain a stranger from New York, and his hospitable soul glowed and expanded under the opportunity.

Meeghan kept up his end, but his answers were vague and monosyllabic. His thoughts were on his conquest, so much so that it was not until Mary had cleared the table and, piqued by his seeming indifference, retired petulantly to her room that he recalled his reason for being in Varracaville.

Very cautiously he opened his inquiries, and from the old man's ingenuous replies soon gathered the information that Varracaville, which he had picked out more or less at random, was exactly suited to his purpose. It was about twenty miles by road from the Border, and about forty from El Paso. Los Menadnos would make an excellent loading-point in Mexico, whence it could be brought by a roundabout way across the line and into El Paso.

From there it would be easy to distribute. There were a dozen different ways, well known to the bootlegging fraternity, in which a truck-load of liquor could be filtered

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north to the oil-fields, where a quart of whisky would bring from twenty to thirty dollars.

McManus seemed to know all the ins and outs of the border traffic in contraband, and before the hands of the alarm-clock on the shelf pointed to nine Meeghan's adroit questioning had brought out the fact that he had been a gun-runner during the troubles of nineteen fifteen and sixteen.

Honest as daylight according to his own code, old Luke McManus was a survival of the old border days when every man legislated for himself with an old-style Colt. Law and order when it came found him a willing enough adherent so long as it confined itself to matters which did not affect his personal liberty. A law providing penalties for theft or murder he could understand and uphold; but customs regulations were beyond his comprehension, and a Federal policy for which he could see no valid reason meant less than nothing to him. The Eighteenth Amendment infuriated him.

"It ain't as if it was any crime to drink liquor nor yet to sell it," he declared with a smack of the fist in a horny palm. "Stands to reason when folks get to tellin' me what I can drink and what I can't they're actin' plumb foolish."

Meeghan nodded corroboration.

"It's a —— of note when a coupla guys can't take a shot if they feel like it," he agreed.

Luck was certainly breaking right, he declared. Here was a partner made to order, one who knew the ropes and had been in the game from the ground up. What was more, a hick who would take in a perfect stranger without asking for a cent would be a cinch. Why the old simp didn't even know enough to take care of his own wife! That end of it would be simple enough.

He flattened his thin lips over his teeth in a twisted smile and decided that it was safe to put his fortunes to the test. Cautiously he unfolded his plans, McManus nodding his grizzled head in agreement. But when he made his final play and came out with a partnership offer the old man looked dubious.

"It's a cinch," urged Meeghan. "You know the game. We can't lose."

"It ain't that," McManus told him. "It's just that I don't like it someway."

"What's the harm?"

"I don't know. Seems like there ain't no real harm to it, but someway I never did love the idea of peddlin' booze."

"You said yourself you'd been a gun-runner," insisted Meeghan. "Where's the difference?"

McManus cogitated.

"There ain't no real difference, I suppose," he said slowly, "and yet it somehow seems different to me. I wouldn't think no less of you for doing it, but I don't rightly feel like I want to touch it myself."

Meeghan yawned elaborately and rose.

"Well, suit yourself about it, brother," he remarked. "But you're missing a good thing, and don't forget I told you so."

McManus chuckled.

"I won't," he promised.

TO McMANUS, as he led the way to bed, the incident was closed, but to his guest it was only a beginning. A partner he must have, and the old man was just the partner he wanted. He realized that there was not the slightest use of continuing the conversation with McManus. There was a look in the keen blue eyes that told him that his arguments would be in vain.

But Meeghan was far from giving up. A few minutes' observation had been sufficient to show him that there was another way of getting what he wanted, and as he fell asleep he decided to lose no time.

Accordingly he waited only until old Luke was out of the house next morning to begin.

Mary had stepped out to the wood-pile and was collecting a few sticks to replenish the stove when he joined her.

"That's no kind of work for a doll like you," he announced, taking the wood out of her arms. "Let me take it."

"You're too classy-looking for this kind of a job," he went on when they had returned to the kitchen.

"Fresh," she giggled, tossing her head.

"I may be fresh, but I know class when I see it," he persisted.

"You know a lot, don't you?"

"Quite a bit," he told her complacently. "I know you're some baby."

She turned away with her head in air and then looked back with a sidelong glance.

From then on it was plain sailing, over a course that Spike Meeghan had charted a thousand times. He had a way with the

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dolls, had Spike Meeghan, as cleverer women than Mary had found to their cost.

"Want me to tell you something, sweetness?" he said at last.

"You might tell me who gave you any leave to call me that," she informed him, but her eyes were invitational.

"Suppose I tell you something else instead," he countered. "Suppose I tell you that I can fix it so you won't have to carry any more wood or wash any more dishes."

"Yes, you can fix it."

"I could if your husband would listen to reason. I could put him in the way of making so much money you couldn't spend it all. New clothes—trip to New York—anything you liked. Figure it out for yourself."

"You couldn't!" she breathed, her eyes alight.

"Listen," he ordered, and unfolded his plan.

"There's so much in it that if I told you how much you'd say I was a liar," he concluded at length. "But what's the use of talking? He won't do it."

Mary's eyes flashed.

"I'll bet he will," she declared.

"No use," Spike told her craftily. "I asked him to come in with me last night, but he won't touch it."

"You wait and see. He'll come in if I say so."

He gave a scornful laugh.

"I guess not," he told her.

She stamped her foot.

"What I say to him goes," she flashed. "I guess I'm the boss around here. If I tell him to he'll do it and do it quick."

"Well, if he will so much the better, but he'd better say so if he's coming. I can't wait forever."

"You wait till tomorrow."

Meeghan affected to consider.

"All right," he agreed, slipping his hand over hers where it lay on the table.

She made a not too strenuous effort to draw it away, then let it lie there and smiled at him.

"I'd wait for you where I wouldn't do it for any one else, sweetness," he whispered.

The wait was not a long one. It terminated that evening after supper when Mary had cleared the table and left the room with a meaning glance at her husband and a reassuring smile at his guest.

McManus cleared his throat, twisted his long legs around the rungs of his chair and began the conversation.

"About what we was talking about last night," he began. "I've been thinking it over, and seems like I'd changed my mind about going in with you."

"That's the stuff," Meeghan encouraged him.

"To tell you the truth," the old man went on, flushing, "it seems like Mary heard us talking last night, and she's set her heart on my doing it."

"She's got the right idea, brother," commented Spike. "She's got a good head on her, Miz McManus has."

The old man glowed under the compliment to Mary.

"You bet she has," he agreed. "There ain't many men in the Southwest has got a cleverer, smarter wife than Mary, nor a prettier, neither."

Meeghan slapped him on the back.

"You said it," he affirmed. "You're a lucky guy."

"Lucky is right. What I always say, 'I don't never deny Mary nothin' in reason.'

"And she's true as steel, Mary is. You wouldn't think she'd care a cuss about an old wampus like me, but she's the sweetest truest little girl— I'm lucky all right."

It was some time before the old man could be prevailed upon to cease his eulogy of Mary and get down to business, and it was after midnight before the details were finally arranged. It was decided that they were to share and share alike in expenses and profits, and that McManus was to be in charge of bringing the liquor across the line, while Meeghan took care of the distribution.

It was agreed that McManus should make the preparations for the first trip while Meeghan lay low at home. The arrangement was the suggestion of the latter. To McManus it never occurred to look behind the face of it. Even if he had not been willing to trust Mary with his life, loyalty to a partner was so much a part of the old desert man's simple code that once a man was joined to him by the ties of common enterprise no thought of distrust could have entered his mind.

Therefore during the three days of preparation which followed, most of which the old man spent away from home, his guest was left a clear field. Three days is not a long time, but Spike Meeghan, as he would

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have had no hesitation in admitting, was a fast worker.

Perhaps it is not unreasonable that a girl of Mary McManus's attractions should yearn for something beyond the battered imperfections of old Luke. He himself would have been the first to admit that he couldn't understand what she saw in him. Then too, young men with sleek hair and well-cut clothes, talking glibly of an enchanted life far away in the magic city of New York, were uncommon in her experience. And Spike Meeghan's ways were not the ways of the swains of Varracaville.

AT ANY rate it came about that on the night before the start the old desert man, returning earlier than usual, was in time to hear and see something that stopped him dead in his tracks and made him shrink away from the open window which had betrayed the two inside.

His first reaction, the natural one, made him reach for his hip where swung the old style Colt that was never far from his reach.

Then in the act of drawing it he stopped and slid it back into the holster.

"Mary wants him, I reckon," he said simply, and in the words lay a great renunciation.

He turned away with sagging shoulders, a broken old man stumbling through the dark with legs which had lost their spring and a heart suddenly cold and empty.

His impulse, half-formed in his stunned mind, was to go away at once and forever. If Mary wanted anything that was enough, and if Mary wanted Spike Meeghan she should have him.

Then as he shambled out toward the desert, bowed down with the weight of his unhappiness, it occurred to him that perhaps Spike Meeghan didn't want Mary. Suppose after gaining her love and trust he should treat her as he had just treated McManus.

Suppose that all the time he was deceiving her and that at the last he would leave her with such a weight on her heart as McManus himself was carrying even now. A man who would be a traitor to his partner wouldn't hesitate to do the same to a woman who trusted him.

Old Luke McManus turned on his heel and retraced his steps. At all costs he must protect Mary.

There was no plan in his mind as he entered the house and sat down to dinner as if nothing had happened. To all questions he returned the usual answers. One though only was in his mind, to save Mary from her own folly—how, he didn't know. And as he lay awake that night, staring at the ceiling, only one coherent thought came to him.

"He ain't good enough for her," he muttered over and over. "He ain't fitten to take care of her. He'd do her like he done me."

The start was made before dawn the next morning, and, jolting over the long miles by the glare of the truck headlight, he revolved the same thought in his mind. Strangely enough, his own part in the drama beyond the dull ache in his heart, had no significance for him. It was of Mary only that he thought. Meeghan was a man who was not square with a partner. Therefore Meeghan was not worthy of Mary.

"He'll do her like he done me," McManus decided, eying Meeghan covertly as he lay back in the truck seat.

The words formed a crude refrain in his head as they jolted down the road, splashed through the ford of the Rio Grande and climbed the farther bank into old Mexico.

It was well after dark before they set out on the return trip from Los Menadnos with a load which Meeghan gleefully estimated would net them ten thousand dollars, and still the refrain beat through the old man's head—

"He'll do her like he done me."

Some time after midnight they crossed the ford again and jolted into the United States, and McManus, mulling over in his head a thousand useless schemes to save Mary from her folly, headed the truck by a roundabout way for El Paso.

"Looks like a cinch to me," remarked Meeghan after a long silence. "No trouble at all getting across the line."

Hardly had he spoken when a sudden turn in the road brought them full on to a party of mounted men.

Instantly McManus snapped off the lights and threw on the power. The heavy truck crashed forward into the dark. There was a flash, the crack of a revolver from the side of the road, and they were clear.

"The marshal," grunted McManus, clinging grimly to the wheel. "Hang on; we're goin' to go."

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The truck plunged forward into the blackness, driven more by luck and instinct than anything else. For perhaps ten minutes the blind rush continued, the truck roaring and leaping through the dark, while Meeghan clung to a stanchion of the cab and McManus strained silently to hold it on the road. Then he snapped on the lights and gave a sigh of relief.

"Pretty close thing," he remarked.

"I'll say so."

"It ain't over yet either," continued the old man. "The marshal, he's death on blockade running. He'll grab the first car he sees and get after us. All we can do is run for it and try to beat him to El Paso."

Meeghan cursed bitterly.

"Looks to me like the game is gummed," he mourned.

The old man did not reply, for above Meeghan's voice and louder than the roar of the truck a voice cried in his ears—

"He'll do her like he done me."

Silently he watched the road in the glare of the headlights as the truck, her throttle wide open, rocked and reeled and ate up the long miles.

Then as he spun the wheel frantically and jammed on the brakes there came a sickening lurch to the side of the road. With a crash they stopped short.

HARDLY had Meeghan had time to recover from the shock when he found the old man down in the road, examining the steering-gear with a flashlight.

"Knuckle's broke," he announced at length.

"What's the answer?"

"Leave her here and take to the mesa, I reckon," McManus told him mournfully.

"And let that hick marshal get our load?"

"Looks thataway. Be glad if he don't foller us up too."

The case left no room for argument. Without a word Meeghan shrugged his shoulders and followed the tall figure through the gloom.

Fifty paces of sandy going, however, brought him to a halt.

"Ain't there no road?" he demanded.

"Nary road."

"Then how the —— do we expect to get anywheres?" he wanted to know.

"Easy 'nough. We keep goin'."

"How far?"

"Upwards of forty-five mile, I reckon."

"You're crazy," Meeghan exploded. "Whaddya take me for anyways? A horse?"

McManus allowed himself a grim smile under cover of the darkness.

"You'll wish't you was a horse before you get through," was his answer. "Come on, if you're comin'. It's two days—maybe more. I ain't got no time to argue 'bout it."

Dawn found them slogging through the shifting sand, McManus with the long, shambling stride of the desert man, Meeghan panting and cursing a yard or two behind.

"Say, when do we get to water?" he gasped at length.

"Sundown, if our luck holds."

"My ——! When do we rest?"

"Reckon we're safe enough to set down for a few minutes now if you want to."

They stretched themselves at full length in the sand. McManus unbuckled the heavy Colt from around his waist and laid it under a mesquite, marking the spot with a white stone.

"What's that for?" asked the other idly.

"She's a good old gun," he explained. "I aim to come back and get her later. Right now every pound you carry's goin' to make a heap of difference."

Meeghan felt the short automatic in his side pocket, and his thin lips flattened themselves against his teeth in his peculiar twisted smile. It was always something, he reflected, to know that you had a gat on you, particularly if the other guy hadn't.

McManus was a sap-head, he decided. First he let a guy get away with murder with his woman, and then he threw away his rod just at the start of a forty-five mile walk with the same guy. Still an' all, what the —— else could you expect of a hick that was raised up in a country like this?

Idly he let his gaze wander over the stark desolation on every side.

As far as eye could reach it stretched, gray, formless, vast. Far above hung a buzzard, motionless against the steely blue.

"What the —— kind of a bird is that?" he asked suddenly. "That there?"

McManus glanced upward.

"Buzzard," he told him briefly.

His head was ringing again with the steady refrain—

"He'll do her like he done me."

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"What the —— does he find to eat in a place like this?"

"Right now," said the old man grimly, "he's prob'ly figuring on you and me."

Meeghan shuddered. The gray waste was bad enough, but the buzzard added a final note of horror. It would be a fearful thing to die in this place, he thought, and be torn and mangled by the buzzard. There it hung, waiting—unhurried, like—well, like the electric chair.

He leaped to his feet with an oath.

"Let's go!" he almost screamed. "Let's get out of here!"

Again they took up the interminable plodding, the sand slipping under their feet and the mounting sun scorching their backs.

"I'd give a dollar an' a half for a cup of water," said Meeghan suddenly; and again fifteen minutes later—

"I'd give a dollar an' a half for a cup of water."

McManus chuckled huskily.

"Make it two and maybe an angel will fly down with one for you," he suggested.

The sun was well up before they made their next halt. It beat with merciless waves of blasting heat, in which sand and rim-rock and mesquite danced as if in agony. Occasionally on the far horizon a dust-cloud whirled to the sky, a twister, tortured by conflicting winds into a thousand unearthly shapes.

A VAGUE, formless horror gradually worked itself into Meeghan's mind. The stark, limitless desolation appalled him, his eyeballs were seared by the pitiless glare; and above, the buzzard swung and wheeled and dipped ceaselessly.

He cursed it with a wild helplessness, as he had known men to curse on being sentenced to the chair. Again the horrible restlessness came over him. He must be moving, going somewhere, anywhere out of the gray, formless horror that enveloped him.

A sudden insane suspicion flashed into his mind, and he gave it voice.

"Say, old guy, how do you know where we're headin' anyway?" he rasped.

McManus turned slowly from something on their back track that he had been watching.

"Easy enough," he told him. "D'you see that little notch of the sky-line, dead ahead?"

Meeghan nodded, straining his eyes.

"Well, just keep your eye on that. That's where the railroad comes through, and that's where we're headin'."

He turned again and looked at the horizon behind them.

A warm surge of confidence returned to Meeghan. Here was something tangible, a definite end to the waste. McManus was an old fool on whom he no longer needed to depend for guidance. Again he smiled his twisted, flat-lipped smile. Something of the feeling communicated itself to his next words.

"What's eatin' you!" he demanded as McManus stared steadily over the way they had come. "Whaddya think you're seein'?"

"Just looking," said the old man quietly. "Just looking—and thinking."

"Thinkin', ——!" snarled Meeghan. "A guy like you don't never think. He just sets."

McManus made no answer, but his eyes hardened under their puckered lids. Meeghan was perhaps as close to his death at that instant as he had ever been in his evil career.

"Come on old man. Squirrels'll get you if you stay here much longer."

He rose and plodded on. With a last look at the horizon McManus rose and followed. Vaguely a shadowy plan was forming in his mind. Fascinated by the thought, he slowly worked out the details, ever and again glancing at the back trail as he plodded forward. At times the horror of the thing came to him, and he shuddered as with a sudden ague, but always at these times came the thought of Mary and the steady refrain—

"He'll do her like he done me."

Then of a sudden he determined to put his theories to the test.

"Say!" he ejaculated, and the voice seemed to him singularly unlike his own. "Say now. About Mary——"

As he broke off, at a loss for words Meeghan stopped dead in his tracks and whirled toward him.

"Well, say it!" he barked.

Then his hand leaped to his side pocket and he laughed a hard laugh. For an instant he had almost been afraid of this old simp.

"What about it?" he demanded.

"What—well, now, what was you aimin' to do about Mary?" faltered the old man huskily.

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Meeghan relaxed and smiled his flat-lipped, twisted smile.

"What's it to you?" he bantered. "An old foot-in-the-grave guy like you ain't got no business with a classy-lookin' young doll.

"Still an' all, just to relieve your feelings," he went on, "I'm goin' to take her along with me for a while when I go. All I got to do is to give her the high sign. She'll come."

For an instant dull red surged through the old desert man's brain, and he tensed himself to spring. In the same instant the dull blue of an automatic showed in Meeghan's hand. For the past twenty-four hours life had been less than nothing to the old man, but a voice beat in his ears—

"He'll kill you, and then he'll do her like he done you."

The time was not yet.

"Will you marry her fair and square if I divorce her?" he asked dully.

Meeghan laughed again, not a pleasant laugh to hear.

"I wouldn't go so far as to say that," he told McManus with a leer. "My wife mightn't like it."

McManus' shoulders sank limply, and he said no more. Instead he turned again and stared at the horizon behind them.

More and more frequently as they toiled on through the blasting heat did he turn and gaze over his shoulder. Once Meeghan asked him with a snarl and an oath what he was looking at.

"Just a habit," explained the old man gently. "I'm kinda curious thataway."

"You're curious every way," stated Meeghan. "It's enough to give a guy the willies to see you. Ain't this place bad enough without you slanting all the time at things that ain't there?"

He gazed at the sheer desolation on every hand and shivered slightly.

"There's that —— bird again," he whined, watching the buzzard.

"He'll more likely get me than you," replied the old man grimly. "I'm nigh about beat. Too old for this desert work, I reckon."

MEEGHAN noticed for the first time that McManus' long, shambling stride had become a staggering stumble, and that his breath came in labored gasps. All at once he realized that for the last hour the pace had been growing slower. Instinctively he looked toward the faint gap in the sky-line which the old man had pointed out as their goal. McManus was failing fast, and it behooved Meeghan to know whither they were heading.

Then without a word he took up the pace again, slightly increasing it. Gasping and stumbling, the desert man rallied and tried gamely to follow. For perhaps fifteen minutes he held the pace. Then as they topped a mound of drifted sand and started down the other side he sank to his knees.

"I'm done," he said simply.

The younger man stood regarding him.

"Looks like it," he said.

"Less'n maybe you could give me a lift," suggested the old man, his eyes lighting with a pathetic hope. "You're young and strong, and it might be if I was to lean on you——"

Meeghan cut him short with a mirthless laugh.

"You're crazy," he announced. "How do you get that way? I got a picture of me carrying you around through this sand."

"You mean you won't help me?"

"You said it. It's every man for himself in this game. I'm on my way."

"Give me five minutes," McManus plead. "Maybe in five minutes I can rest up to where I can make it. Wait that long."

Meeghan seated himself, took out his watch and waited. The other lay face up, motionless, his hat over his eyes.

"Five minutes is up."

McManus made a game effort to rise, and did in fact manage to stand on his feet. Slowly he turned and looked over the brow of the hill, gazing at the back track. Then with resignation in which was mingled a strange excitement he sank to his knees.

"No good," he said. "I'm done."

Meeghan rose, snapped his watch shut and put it in his pocket.

"No use wasting any more time," he announced. "I'm on my way."

"Wait," the old man begged. "Wait just one minute. Listen. You'd leave me here to die of thirst? Your partner?"

The younger man's face hardened.

"It's every man for himself," he answered.

"Wait," McManus pleaded again. "Wait. Just one thing. It ain't much to do for an old man that's dying. Your partner that never done you no harm. Just one last favor that'll wipe out what's between us and leave me peaceful."

"Well?"

"You got a gun. Put a bullet through

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my head. You wouldn't leave a dog to die of thirst out here."

Meeghan turned away impatiently, then turned back. After all, a killing more or less was a small matter to him, and to die in this place of thirst——

"The buzzard," gasped McManus suddenly. "Don't let him get me alive after I'm too weak to move."

"The buzzard," gasped McManus again. "He'll eat the eyes outa my head."

"All right!" Meeghan almost screamed. "Don't talk no more about it."

His hand slid into his coat pocket and came forth with the little wicked-looking automatic. He fingered it nervously.

"Right here," gasped McManus again. "Right at the back of my head where I won't see you do it. Wait."

With a sudden effort he tore open his shirt and unbuckled the money-belt from about his waist.

"Take this," he whispered swiftly. "It's all the money I've got in the world. Upwards of seven thousand dollars. It's for Mary. Be good to her."

For an instant he raised his head and seemed to be listening. Then with surprizing swiftness he rolled over on his face.

"Quick!" he shouted at the top of his lungs. "For God's sake!"

Hastily shading his eyes with his hand, Meeghan pulled the trigger. There was a sharp crack, instantly swallowed up in the stillness. The old, loose-jointed body twitched convulsively and lay quiet.

The old desert man had timed his exit from the drama to a nicety. It was just as Spike Meeghan stepped back from the body, the smoking pistol in one hand and the money-belt in the other, that the marshal and his posse urged their sweating ponies over the brow of the hill.

Author of "Fading Light," "The Blunderer," etc.

THERE was mild reproof in Grenier's eyes as he looked across the table at his companion, a thick-set, bullet-headed man dressed in a stained suit of blue serge.

"You say you get the *troca* for me, Burchen," he complained. "One month, two months I wait. Always you come back—same story. Old chief will not sell, you say. *Bien!* I believe, but it make not my factory go. I mus' have *troca* shell at once or I mus' close. That is bad. I give one more chance, then I change traders. It becomes impossible, this!"

"Tapu". copyright 1923, by J. D. Newsom.
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He rubbed his long hands together as he spoke and the cigaret in the corner of his mouth jumped up and down, punctuating each word with a puff of smoke.

"You sit here in Nouméa and grumble," Burchen retorted. "Don't I know you want the shell? I've been after old Na'o for six months—each trip it's the same thing. Doesn't want to sell for some fool reason, and he's got a hundred and fifty tons of the stuff at least! But I've fixed his feet. I'll get it next time I go up."

"You have told me that—how many times?" queried Grenier, sipping his absinthe.

"How the —— do I know?" growled Burchen.

He was not pleasant to behold, his weather-beaten countenance was coarse and thick, his small eyes were blood-shot, he talked in a harsh voice out of the corner of his mouth, but Grenier had seen traders come and traders go, and his stock of raw material was running low.

"Very well," he murmured placidly. "You do not know? I explain again——"

THEY were sitting beneath the awning of the Café Cussac, facing the Square of the Coconut Trees, where a fountain, surmounted by a scabrous statue of a lightly clad young woman supposed to represent the French Republic, sent a thin jet of water up into the hot, still air.

Nouméa within its girdle of hills lay panting and desolate in the grip of the noontide sun. What life there was in all New Caledonia seemed to be concentrated beneath the awning of the Café Cussac where officials, soldiers and traders were chattering over their *apéritifs*.

Grenier felt quite safe, at ease, surrounded as he was by acquaintances and he went to great lengths to make clear Burchen's sins of omission. It gave him intense pleasure to watch the trader's sullen face twitch with anger as he drove home each barbed shaft, speaking slowly and distinctly that their neighbors might know how he treated such ruffians.

He did not like Burchen, but the latter, unfortunately, virtually monopolized the trade of Motlowa and of most of the other islands in the Banks group. He had driven off his competitors and spread terror among the Kanakas, a gin bottle in one hand, a whip in the other. Natives called him the Whip-Man, and his word was law. Not even the missionaries could overcome his hold on the people, but in Nouméa conditions were different—there were police and tribunals and prisons, all sorts of restrictions for the barbarian.

A silence settled over the Café Cussac as Grenier talked, there were covert smiles and nods and winks. Grenier was establishing a noteworthy precedent.

"Ah," he was saying, "but the Kanakas they laugh at you, my good *monsieur*. You must not allow the Kanakas to laugh. It is bad for the prestige, is it not? One hundred and fifty tons of *troca* shell! It is fantastic! You see, you touch, you smell—and you leave it behind because a chief, he have the religious scruples!"

"Yes, and a hundred spears. You try it," suggested Burchen very red in the face.

"That is not my business. I am the buyer. You say, 'Wait until next trip, I got him feexed.' *Bien!* I wait. You come back with bananas for Sydney and copra for Sydney and much cheap cargo. But *troca* shell—no. Next time, always you got him feexed."

"But I tell you I have!" suddenly bellowed Burchen, so loud that Grenier sat back as if he had been struck in the face. "I've got Na'o where I want him. In a month you'll have the stuff. Now give us a rest, savvy, Mr. Grenier, or I'll take the shell to Sydney."

"Ha! The good joke! First catch the *troca*."

Burchen leaned across the table.

"Listen here," he said softly. "Stop that talk or I'll wring your neck. You get that straight."

"The threat is no good. You wring nobody's neck in Nouméa." Grenier nonchalantly tapped the ash off his cigaret. "It is not my fault you made promise, but it is great shame you have Motlowa to yourself. Competition it is stimulating."

"Once more—will you stop it?" Burchen's eyes were blood-shot and his lips moved stiffly. His hands seemed to be creeping across the intervening space toward Grenier.

A minute trickled by slowly, painfully, while the Café Cussac held its breath. Grenier had gone too far, ran the unspoken verdict. One tormented a bull when one stood on the other side of the hedge, but one was careful to see that the field where

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the bull snorted was empty. If Burchen gave battle somebody would surely be injured. Three soldiers sitting near by loosened their leather belts with careful, noiseless movements.

MEANWHILE Grenier twisted the ends of his waxed mustache and watched the blunt fingers splayed out before him among the tumblers. He did not want to back down, he was tired of Burchen's ways, but the fellow was dangerous.

A man sitting close behind them suddenly untangled his long legs and came over to their table. He was tall, his shoulders stooped slightly and his long arms dangled loosely as he walked. His emaciated face was flint-like, molded like that of some brass Buddha, and when he spoke in a drawling, colorless voice, only his lips moved. He stood before them, his head bent forward, his slate-gray eyes roving from Grenier to Burchen and back again.

"I guess there's been a misunderstanding," he announced. "I heard you two talking. Where did you get the notion that Motlowa's a closed market?"

"Mr. Burchen he spread the rumor. He have ver' extensive knowledge of Banks Islands."

"Glad to meet Mr. Burchen. My name's Martindale. Don't suppose you know me. My home port is Seattle. Been pottering around in the southern Hebrides for some time, but if there's that much *troca* shell lying about loose in the Banks, why, I'm going up after it."

"Ah, *monsieur* is *Américain!*" exclaimed Grenier, his face beaming.

"Right first time. Some of us do drift beyond Papeete."

Burchen still sprawled in his seat, one elbow resting on the table. His expression relaxed into a mirthless smile as he looked up over his shoulder at the speaker.

"When you drift my way," he suggested, "have your life insured."

Martindale ignored him and gave his attention to Grenier.

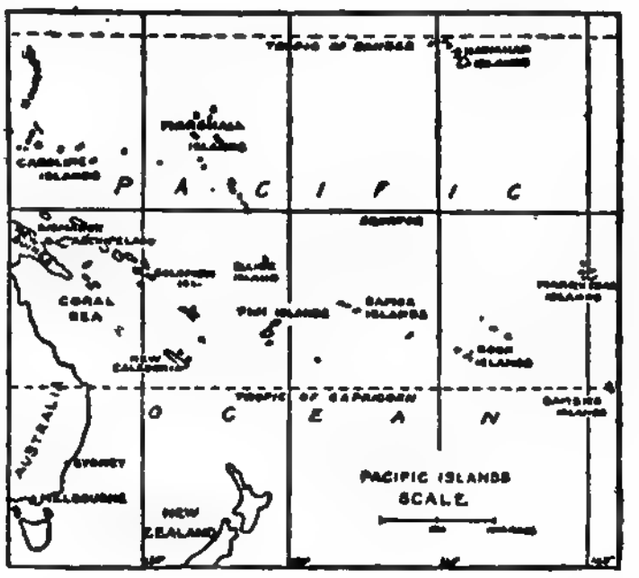
"I came down here to refit," he explained.

His long arms were folded behind his back, his feet were set wide apart, his whole bearing was one of unassumed ease.

"I'm going north tomorrow in ballast, so I'll go up to Motlowa and look around. You said—" he let his eyes rest on Burchen, "—the chief's name was Na'o, didn't you?"

"Exactly, but I'm telling you—keep away."

"I know. Lurgard came down to Vila with a welt across his face an inch wide," he ticked off the incidents on his fingers. "You did that with a whip I believe. Then you burned Petersen's launch because he wouldn't let you handle his trade. I met him too. And you chased old man Walters half-way to Port Moresby just because he lifted six bags of copra from under your nose. I'm well informed."



"You bet your life you are," sneered Burchen. "And I'll chase you all the way to Easter Island if I catch you poaching."

"For a long time," went on Martindale, "I've wanted to meet you. You're not as terrible as I thought you'd be."

He inspected Burchen from head to foot, leisurely, minutely, and the *apéritif*-drinkers shifted uneasily in their chairs.

"You get to —— out of here!" Burchen suddenly cried, jumping to his feet. "I've had enough of this. Get out!"

Still Martindale stood motionless.

"Mr. Grenier," he declared. "I'll bring you the shell. Of course, I can't quote any prices yet——"

"Never mind," Grenier tugged at his mustache. "I am agreeable to the understanding. Only *vite*, make haste!"

"He'll make haste," Burchen said harshly. "I'll help him. That shell is going to Sydney—and I'll see it gets there."

"It won't," Martindale drawled sadly. "You dare not go to Sydney. If you went

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you would never come out—of jail. I know so much about you! Such cacklings I have listened to! You have to tranship here or at Vila and lose half your profits."

Burchen's eyes were narrowed down to glowing slits and all color had drained from his face.

"If I catch you on Motlowa," he whispered. "If I catch you——"

"If you catch me—yes?" Martindale inquired politely.

"He will wheep you until you faint," explained Grénier, winking at the occupants of a near-by table.

The proprietor of the Café Cussac and his staff were edging in ready to save the crockery and glassware should the worst happen.

"Tut!" commented Martindale. "How primitive!"

BURCHEN, no longer able to restrain his temper, leaped forward, bellowing. He lunged and went sprawling on to the ground where he rolled over all tangled up in the legs of the iron table, for Martindale lazily, yet with astonishing speed, had shifted out of the way of the outflung fist.

"My glasses!" screamed the proprietor, but his voice was smothered by the yells of his customers. From neighboring houses people came running, half-dressed, straight from their midday siesta. Grenier, standing on his chair, shouted advice; shrill police whistles began to blow, and Burchen roared. There was murder in his blood-shot eyes when he regained his feet.

Then Martindale, apparently the only cool observer of the whole affair, suddenly did an unheard of thing.

"I'm going to get that shell," he called out. "No time to fight now."

And he turned and fled straight across the Square followed by tumultuous shouts of derision. Burchen lumbered off in pursuit, but long before he reached the fountain his prey flapped around a corner heading toward the water-front. He retraced his steps only to find that Grenier, too, had vanished and all the Café Cussac smiled upon him, ruefully, deprecatingly.

"Yea—" he growled. "You better smile. I'll make Grenier eat the —— shell, right here before you, you——s"

He left Nouméa the next morning, going north in the wake of Martindale's schooner, the *Thutmose III*, which had weighed anchor less than two hours after its owner's hasty retreat.

"I'll get him at Vila," Burchen told himself. "Get him where he can't run, the yellow dog!"

But at Vila he found that the *Thutmose III* had cleared for the Banks, still in ballast, and he went on his way rejoicing.

NA'O, chief of the people of Motlowa, head of the Vatakwe lodge, lay dying in the sunlight. For many weeks demons had been gnawing at his bowels; for as many weeks doctors had pretended to suck stones and bits of rags from his body, crying aloud that they had at last exorcised the evil spirits, but always the pain came back more terrible than ever, until he looked-forward expectantly for the time to come when he would set sail in his canoe for the island of the dead.

He was very old, gnarled and wrinkled, astonishingly frail as he lay full length on the ground, his eyes half-closed to keep out the glare of the sun. Each time he breathed he heard the demons hammering at his lungs, making his throat rattle like a dried pod.

He was too weak to move or speak, but he could hear the whimpering of his women, the mutter of his kinsmen's voices, the sound of the wind in the tree-tops. Occasionally among all these noises he distinguished the voice of Katu, his sister's son, who would succeed him, and each time he fought desperately that he might be allowed to cry out just once, for he knew that Katu's magic was killing him.

Katu had stolen a lock of his hair and some of his nailparings and had buried these beneath a stone in the jungle while he whispered certain words. Na'o realized that as the nails and the hair rotted so must his body rot too.

One night, in the days of his strength and vigor, his youngest wife, Matawi, had crawled to his side and had warned him of these things—and at once he had been stricken. All his women had searched through the jungle for the package day after day only to come back empty-handed, wailing.

So he must die, and Katu would inherit his wives and his power, Katu the schemer who coveted Matawi and the hoard of shell in the shed by the river.

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Na'o moved uneasily as he thought of the treasure. It was worth pounds and pounds of tobacco, fathoms of bright cloths, iron pots, matches and a thousand other desirable things. Many years ago he had set the tribe to work up and down the coast collecting the shell, for he knew its value and could drive a hard bargain with the white traders.

Then had come one of the "men with new gods" with great words in his mouth, who had talked of propitiations and offerings and sacrifices. *Wah!* Him they had cut down and eaten. Na'o muttered aloud as the memory stirred him.

But he had had a dream the night of the feast. His ancestors had come to him, row upon row of mighty warriors headed by Kwassa, greatest of all, the sun god. They had squatted in the hut and Kwassa, beating his spear against the ridge-pole, had said——

"O Na'o, make an offering to your gods, such an offering as the gods of the white men might envy."

And Na'o, who had never known fear, trembled as he answered——

"O Kwassa, come from the island in the sky, what can I give? My wives——?"

Kwassa had laughed, golden shafts shooting from his mouth until the interior of the hut blazed with light.

"Neither women nor fruits—greater gifts!"

Na'o had understood, saying humbly—

"The shell will not be sold, O Kwassa! From age to age will the treasure grow, a token and a sacrifice in one."

Then had Kwassa vanished and from that time as the tribesmen added to the store so the village prospered. The soil yielded tenfold and the heads of twoscore captives were stuck on poles above the Vatakwe lodge—fine skulls with masks made of red clay for faces.

He was suddenly aware of a movement in the crowd which surrounded him. There was a great jostling and shouting, even the women forgot to whimper, and he heard quite distinctly Katu's smooth voice saying—

"Make ready. Let ten men bring the canoe. It is said."

It is said! Katu was already using the chief's order, his *tapu!*

The old man's breath rattled more loudly in his throat. Katu! The name made the sluggish blood hammer in his temples. Katu belonged to a new generation which laughed at the Law. He had gone to the mission school at Naran, only to run away and come back with queer vices the people could not understand. He spoke like a trader and acted like some.

Na'o groaned. He was dying, and Katu would barter the hoard of shell for rum and clothes. He would dress Matawi in bright rags which the Whip-Man would bring. *Toh!* That Whip-Man! He must not have the shell, it was *tapu, tapu, tapu!*

The word throbbed and beat in Na'o's brain like the boom of a great war drum. His mouth hung open, his head rolled from side to side, his whole body was shaken by a convulsive tremor.

A cry arose——

"He moves! See!"

"Katu!" The cry came to his lips. "Katu!"

He was sitting up now, propped on his elbows and his eyes were wide open, staring straight ahead as one who already stares into the black gulf of space.

Katu smiled as he bent over the chief. The end was very near indeed, and he knew that his power had come.

"Yes," he said sharply. "I am here. I listen."

"Katu!" Na'o's thin, shrill voice carried to the far end of the row of huts. "O slayer of chiefs——"

"The demons talk," commented Welag, a witch-doctor, who stood close at hand.

"Slayer of chiefs," Na'o went on. "Hear me. The shell is *tapu* to the Whip-Man, *tapu* to the people of Moronau until I give the order. You hear, Katu?" A cough racked him. "*Tapu* until I give the order—*tapu.*"

Then he fell back and died and his screaming women beat their breasts while the warriors clashed their spears together to ward off malignant ghosts.

They placed the body in the mortuary canoe and carried it swiftly through the bush along a winding path to the Vatakwe lodge which stood in a small clearing at the foot of a cliff.

KATU watched while the canoe was placed on trestles in the middle of the lodge, then beneath it he kindled a small fire and placed offerings of food at the dead man's feet. On the fifth day the head would be removed and the soul would

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escape. Thereafter the family would mourn until the thousandth day when the bones would be wrapped up and interred in some secret spot outside the lodge.

For the first five days, however, the ghost would stalk through the village ready to throttle any one who failed in the proper observances; it would sit at all councils, partake of all food, an ever present menace to the life of the people.

But Katu had no fear of the dead, for he had much worldly knowledge. He went through the elaborate ritual with his hands and his lips, his mind on other matters.

At last, having prayed, he turned to the mourners and said:

"Let us return to the village. Na'o is at rest, and I am the chief."

"For the first period you should keep the fire alight," cautioned a relative.

"Wah! Let Ngana tend the flame," retorted Katu. "I have obeyed the law, most of the law—now I go back to the women."

There were mutterings among the elders, but Katu's followers rejoiced for here was a leader who put an end to the fast days and made life easier for the living.

Three days went by while the new chief prepared for the feast which would mark his accession and the liberation of Na'o's soul. Three drunken days beneath the palm-trees of Moronau! But there were those who held back dismayed by the shameless conduct of Katu and his friends. Old men took council together, sitting by the corpse in the Vatakwe lodge. They gathered around them those who still believed in the power of the gods, and they prayed to their ancestors for guidance.

Katu laughed when he heard them grumble, for at his back were the spears and the clubs in the hands of young warriors.

"Great were the bygone chiefs," he told them. "Let us honor them and make offerings, for such is the custom. But what have we to fear from them? At Naran much did I learn of gods and ghosts. Much did I see of white men's ways. Hear me! The days of toil are over——

"Soon will come the Whip-Man, who will give food and meat, matches and tobacco and cloths for the shell Na'o made us collect. There is no need to work, we shall feast——"

"But Na'o placed a *tapu* on the shell——"

"I know. You heard what Welag said: The devils were speaking through Na'o's lips. There is no *tapu*."

So he spent his time drinking *gea* in full sight of the women, an unprecedented occurrence, for the *gea* was sacred to the men of the lodge and only consumed on special occasions.

The tribe's ordered existence gave way in those three days to a chaotic saturnalia; the men abandoned the fishing grounds, the women left the gardens. Life came to a standstill while Katu led the greatest *kolekole* the people had ever known.

WHILE he still lay in his hut on the morning of the fourth day, long after daybreak, a boy came running to him.

"Great Chief," he quavered, for he had slept instead of watching, "a white man has come ashore, already he is close to us."

"The Whip-Man?"

"Another."

Katu staggered to his feet, cursing. The Whip-Man would have been welcome—he was to bring, among other things, a rifle and a case of rum for the new chief's private use. No other trader would agree to such terms; no other trader would dare. The Whip-Man was overdue and Katu realized that he must find some means of stilling the people's discontent without delay. Yet he did not want to deal with a stranger, who would not reward him for his magic and the trouble he had been put to to get rid of Na'o.

Then the newcomer stood before him, studying him with cold slate-gray eyes in a countenance as inflexible as that of a wooden image.

"Got any trade?" inquired the white man, standing at ease with his arms folded behind his back.

"Copra—have got four bags," answered Katu in his fluent mission-school English.

"Pickings. Give you ten bars of 'bacco for 'em. What else you got?"

"Not got anything," Katu said sullenly.

The tribesmen were grouped ten deep around them, listening in silence.

"What about that *troca* shell?"

"Shell? —no have."

"No? You're lying as sure as my name is Martindale. Why——"

"Come back 'nother time," suggested Katu smiling. "You take copra?"

"On the way from the beach," Martindale explained wearily, "I passed a shed full of *troca*. What's that for?"

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"Ah, you come river track!" Katu felt his heart beating very fast, pounding against his ribs. Instinctively, blindly he hated the trader, hated his compelling eyes, hated his domineering ways. Above the heads of the throng he saw quivering spears appear as if by enchantment and, feeling safe, he taunted Martindale.

"*Troca* shell," he said smoothly. "Not for trade. Burchen made business talk. He come soon. You savvy Burchen?"

"Yes," admitted Martindale. "I know him."

"Plenty big fellow, eh? You go quick."

"And if I offer better price?"

"No can do. Whip-Man friend of Katu. Shell belong him."

An old man thrust his way through the crowd. He was so bent over that to look up he had to twist back his head until it rested on one shoulder, and he dragged behind him his left leg all swollen and bloated with elephantiasis.

"O Katu," he cried. "There is a *tapu*—" He faced Martindale and chattered shrilly:

"No can sell *troca*, master. Shell *tapu* by Na'o, chief gone dead. Savvy *tapu?*"

The crowd swayed and growled, voices were raised in protest or approval; the lances massed behind Katu.

"Walui, old fool," he grunted, seizing the elder by the shoulder, "who gave you a right to speak?"

He threw him to the ground, and some warriors laughed.

"That's enough, mission-boy," Martindale's voice had risen a tone. "Stop it!"

"O people of Moronau," cried Katu. "This one means harm. Be ready!"

He turned to the trader with a smile on his round face.

"No make trade," he declared. "You go 'way, or——"

Again the cripple tried to protest, but Katu silenced him by putting a foot over his mouth and bearing down upon it.

Two great hands suddenly seized him, lifted him clear of the ground and he went spinning through the air to crash into the ranks of his supporters.

Down came the spears and a long-drawn cry came from the mob. But they were unprepared for Martindale's onslaught. One second there stood before them an easy-going trader, loose and lank; the next he became a living battering ram, a thing of fists and feet. From one man he wrenched a club. It whirled above his head crashing to right and left, and a lane strewn with the fallen opened in front of him. Before a single spear could be thrown, before a clutching hand could drag him down he was out of the village, trotting down the track to the beach, and with him, fearing Katu's vengeance, went old Walui.

"LOOK here, Katu, what's the idea? I want that stuff and I want it *now*. The gang's waiting to load."

"Master, I know, but—there is the *tapu*——"

"Tabu be ——ed! You're the chief." Burchen glared at the native. "Give the order. I've got all your stuff ready to put ashore.

He was no longer the Burchen of civilized Nouméa, but with the shedding of his collar, he had become the Whip-Man, unwashed, unshaved, red-faced. He wore grimy white trousers and a grimier singlet; the butt-end of a revolver peeped out of his trouser pocket, and in his hand he carried a stock whip. Behind him stood eight of his crew, Tana boys from the southern New Hebrides, watchful and crafty, ready to meet trouble more than half-way.

"You got gun for me?" whispered Katu.

Burchen nodded.

"You got rum?"

"Yes! Ain't I told you? Get your people to work quick!"

"No can do," sighed Katu. "But you get shell by-m'-by—sure. Na'o put *tapu* on him. My people say no can fight dead man *tapu*. Many men go shake like leaf. No touch shell, they say."

"And you're a chief!" roared Burchen.

"I make way. Here, closer," Katu whispered as he bent forward. "Tonight is *kwat ma vule* ceremony, head broken off. Na'o go home of dead. When he go I ask him if he mean *tapu*. If he say nothing, then you get shell. Savvy, fine idea."

"You —— heathen," growled Burchen. "I thought you didn't believe in that stuff."

"No!" Katu flung out his hands in protest and tried to grin. "What priest call 'pagan super-stition.' But people, *wah!* They have big fear. So at ceremony I say, 'Na'o, if *tapu* remain, speak!' and," he leered, "Na'o keep mouth shut up."

"I get you," conceded Burchen who knew the islanders and something of their ways.

"Good. Then I also say: 'If Whip-Man

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not to have shell—speak!' and Na'o keep mouth shut up also. Then you get *troca* shell and all people help load."

"You're wise," agreed Burchen. "I'm going to watch the show tonight because," he tapped Katu on the shoulder with the stock of his whip, "you're too wise to trust, you fat nigger."

"Me good friend," protested the chief. "Yest-day come trader——"

"What trader?" exclaimed Burchen, suddenly on the alert.

Katu, with many gestures, recounted the incidents of the following day, omitting only Martindale's sudden onslaught and his rescue of Walui.

"And this fellah," he concluded, "when he hear me say Whip-Man, he go run for boat quick."

Burchen roared with mirth as he listened to the garbled story. What a yarn he would have to tell in Vila and Nouméa! Why, Martindale would be laughed off the face of the Pacific Ocean.

"Look here," he snapped, sobering up all at once. "Don't forget this—I'm not like that fellow. I'm not running away. I get that shell or I'll bust the whole village open and put your own dirty head on my bowsprit."

"Master, master," Katu soothed him. "Always friend. Now we go make ready for ceremony. You come?"

NIGHT was falling when they reached the lodge of the Vatakwe, an oblong structure standing at the foot of a high cliff in a clearing surrounded on three sides by thick walls of forest and jungle. Bonfires threw dancing lights through the dusk revealing the carved figures flanking the doorway and the row of skulls on the roof. In the ovens whole pigs and yams were roasting, and great stacks of coconuts, *paipai* and bananas were ready for the feast.

Burchen and his men sat apart in the shadows, out of the way of the threescore natives who took part in the ritual.

First the corpse in its canoe was brought out of the lodge and placed in the center of the clearing. Then while the people prayed the *gea*-drinking began. One of the highest ranking men of the Vatakwe, devoid of all clothing or ornaments, squatted on the ground, cross-legged, his feet under his knees.

After water had been poured over his hands he placed a piece of kava root in his mouth and chewed it slowly while the onlookers muttered charms. At last he took out the ball, squeezed the juice into a bowl and added a little water. This was handed to Katu, who drank, bowing toward the corpse. For each man the ritual was repeated.

Time dragged. Burchen drained a gin bottle dry to while away the hours. The gruesomeness of the affair was exasperating him. There was too much silence, too many shadows, too much mystery.

When every man had partaken of the *gea* the feast began after portions of food had been placed in the canoe. They ate enormously, rapidly, and Burchen found that an uneasy, restless feeling was creeping over his hard-bitten Tana boys.

"Keep still, —— you," he whispered. "What the —— is the matter?"

"The dead—" began one stalwart.

"Oh, shut up!" growled Burchen. "Filthy mumbo-jumbo. It's the smell, that's what it is. Now keep quiet or I'll break your neck for you."

After the feast came dancing to the sound of drums. The warriors leaped and whirled, going through the same figures and motions over and over again, until they halted all at once, yelling, their weapons poised as if to strike.

A second later the leaders of the lodge, headed by Katu, issued from the dwelling. They wore long cloaks of leaves reaching to their ankles and their heads were covered with great masks. The drums beat faster and the onlookers fell to their knees, their heads touching the ground for the dancers were supposed to embody the souls of the dead and their slightest glance might kill.

Slowly they went to the canoe and four of them lifted up the corpse.

"Go join Kwassa in the sky. Trouble not the living," chanted Katu. "Watch over the people of Moronau and make them strong. Speak now for the last time!"

The drums were hushed, a pall hung over the clearing, a thick, almost unbearable stillness.

Katu raised a bamboo knife.

"The soul goes up!" he cried. "If the *tapu* is not raised, speak!"

With one slash he severed the head which fell back into the canoe.

"Speak!"

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All the tribesmen prostrated themselves on the ground and moaned while they waited.

Then a greenish light pervaded the clearing, coming from above, from the sky——

Some looked up in terror, others shrieked and groveled. The light grew stronger and an awful voice pealed out——

"The *tapu* is raised!"

Katu was crying hysterically, head thrown back, his arms stretched up toward the brightness. It was not a lie, the dead *did* come back!

"O Na'o," he screamed. "I am weak. Forgive! Forgive!"

"Everything is known," rolled the voice. "Everything! My treasure is *tapu* to the Whip-Man."

THE meeting was breaking up. Men were running madly through the bush, straight before them, anywhere away from that voice and the glare in the sky. The panic took hold of the Tana boys who joined in the headlong flight.

Still Katu kneeled by the canoe, unable to move.

"Now must you sell the treasure," the voice went on. "Let there be no trace of it before another sun goes down or starvation and enemies will come——"

The light went out and the voice ceased. Katu remained crouching on the ground until Burchen kicked him to his feet.

"What's the idea of that bunk?" the trader inquired wrathfully.

"No savvy!" wailed the chief. "Na'o come back. Say no can sell *troca* to Whip-Man!"

"To blazes with that," snarled Burchen. "I'm going to have it."

Fear of the dead proved stronger than fear of the living and Katu stubbornly shook his head.

"No," he whimpered. "Na'o make it *tapu* to you. He say——"

Burchen's whip suddenly struck him full in the face. He reeled back, and the lash tore again and again across his head and body. He shrieked for mercy, cowering against the wall of the lodge.

The lights in the clearing were dying down, the sky above the tree-tops was gray with the coming of dawn, each second the bush-covered summit of the cliff grew clearer.

"You fixed that show," declared Burchen, "but you can't fool me. Do I get the shell?"

On hands and knees Katu bowed before him.

"Master, yes, you get shell," he mumbled. "No more whip!"

"Get up, then. Any more trouble and I'll break you. Go!"

They met stragglers on the way—three of Burchen's crew, a dozen tribesmen, all of them shaken and subdued.

When they reached the village they found all the people awaiting them. Katu marched on until he was surrounded by his warriors then he cried out:

"You heard Na'o speak, yet the Whip-Man struck me because I would not break the *tapu*. Take him!"

In the rush that followed the pent-up terror of the natives found an outlet. Burchen fought like some wild thing, but at last, crushed beneath a squirming mass, he gave way. Torn and battered, blood flowing from a dozen cuts, he was bound and at the chief's order thrown on the ground by the door of a hut. Of his men two lay dead, the rest had fled to the beach where they had made frantic haste to launch their boat and row out to the schooner.

BROAD on his back in the noontide heat lay Burchen while Katu squatting in the shade flicked him occasionally with his whip.

"So we wait," the chief said for the hundredth time. "If Na'o send death to people of Moronau, you die too."

"Drink!" begged the trader.

"No. When shell go you get drink. Shell no go, you no get drink, savvy?"

Katu was still explaining his belief in the faith of his fathers when watchers on the beach sent word that another schooner had entered the bay and that the man with the face of wood was coming ashore again.

He reached the village some minutes later followed by a string of porters.

"Make trade talk now, mission-boy?" he inquired.

"Yes, yes, yes!" Katu was beside himself with anxiety to settle matters.

"Untie that fellow first," ordered Martindale, "and put him in the shade. That's right. No, I don't want to know what he did. It's only too obvious."

"He——"

"Quiet! I'll give you ten cases of 'bacco,

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five rolls of cloth, one case of kerosene and matches and these iron pots. Is it a deal?"

"Yes," breathed Katu.

"Dump!"

Martindale's porters let their loads fall at the chief's feet.

"Now put your people to work toting the shell to the beach. This man," he indicated a half-breed boy whose uniform was a loincloth and a sailor's cap, "will see to the loading. Now get started, I want to talk to this fellow alone."

He moved over to where Burchen sprawled.

"Great stunt, wasn't it?" he remarked pleasantly. "I fixed it. Old Walui told me about last night's show so I took my boat a few miles up the coast—there's a splendid harbor just east of here—and then we crawled to the top of the cliffs with a couple of green flares——"

"But you don't speak the local lingo—" choked Burchen.

"No, but my dear old Walui——"

"Walui?"

"Yes, the gentleman with the swollen limb. Oh, you didn't hear? Too bad. You must ask the chief about him some time." Martindale almost smiled. "Well, Walui did the talking through a megaphone just to make his voice sound stronger. He's rather decrepit, you know. I'm going to lug him around as a mascot."

"What's to keep me from telling Katu about this?" sneered Burchen as he struggled to his feet.

"You have been ill-treated once today," Martindale drawled sadly. "I should hate having to repeat the operation. I think you'll come with me and allow me to see you on board your boat.

"I will like ——" retorted Burchen. "I'm going to give you the thrashing——"

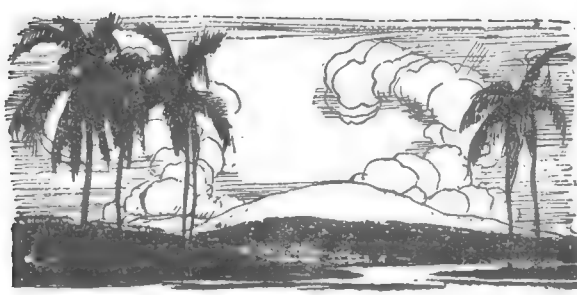
"Not now."

Martindale's fingers closed like steel around the other man's arm.

"You're not fit. Some other time will do just as well I suppose." He tightened his pressure until Burchen winced, then he went on placidly: "You know, I never fight if I can avoid it. I guess you're thinking of that day in Nouméa. Sorry I disappointed you, but I wanted to make the tide, otherwise we'd have pulled out together. So I ran away—I always run away if it's to my advantage.

"You'll come quietly, won't you?"

The last sound to drift out to Burchen as his schooner left Moronau Bay was the singing of the natives as they marched back and forth between the shed and the beach bearing great sacks full of shell. It was a song of deliverance, and Martindale, standing with his arms folded behind his back, his face as mournful as ever, was their savior.



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The SEAL of JENGHIS KHAN

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by H. Bedford-Jones

Author of "Two Men," 'Pirate's Gold," etc.

I

JIM PATRICK had been gone for three weeks and, so far as Hume could tell, might be gone for ever. Hume had little hope that his friend could pull through to Urga. As Hume sat beside the fire, smoking nearly the last of his tobacco, he stared into the embers and reviewed the catalogue of disaster. In his deep-set, patient eyes brooded despair. So little gained—so much lost! From the time the expedition started into the mountains of Mongolia, bad luck had dogged him. Now he was almost alone, cut off, a fugitive; everything else gone.

The horses, hobbled to one side, fretted uneasily. From some far spot among the encircling mountains, the quavering pæan of a wolf echoed to the cold stars. A keen wind blustered high above the camp, stirring the tips of the larches and pines, whistling in monotonous insistence through the loftier trees, roaring over the naked rock of the rugged heights. The northern sky was filled with a soft greenish borealis, a liquid glow of radiance that lifted and fell in such imperceptible gradation that the eye could not follow its changes. All else was bleak darkness, and starry pin-points, and the desolation of approaching Winter.

From the darkness beyond the range of firelight, appeared a short, squat figure clad in skins. Glancing up as a branch of wood fell on the fire, Hume met the cheerful grin of his one remaining companion—Namki, a Kalmuck Tatar who was guide and wizard and optimist extraordinary. The Wintry chill died out of the severe features of Hume, and he silently extended his very thin tobacco-pouch. Namki squatted down, tucked some of the brown dust into his little bone pipe, and held an ember to the bowl. Hume addressed him—

"My friend, I'm afraid you are a tremendous liar."

Namki grinned, fastened his glittering, beady eyes on Hume, and waited.

"A liar from start to finish," went on Hume, smiling a little. "You, a wizard! From the time we started, you predicted wonderful things, great luck ahead! And what happened?"

"You found the things you sought, master," said Namki, exhaling a thin steam of smoke. "Old manuscripts from the monasteries, bones from the hills, queer little beasts that you had never seen before and that fell into your traps. You were very glad."

Hume's wide lips twitched bitterly.

"Glad! Yes. But what happened? The night before we met those cursed Chinese bandits, you fussed over a sheep's shoulder-blade and predicted great good luck ahead. You, a wizard!"

Namki shrugged.

"Well, master! It is true that we met those bandits, and they destroyed our people and killed most of us; but I think we slew a few of them likewise. It is true that

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you and I and Redchin escaped alone; but the good luck still awaits us."

"Liar!" said Hume, without heat. Indeed, there was warm affection in the gaze he fastened upon the Kalmuck. "Our friends are dead, everything we had is lost. Redchin, as you call my partner, went to Urga three weeks ago and has not returned. Probably he was murdered before reaching Urga—murdered by another band of the Living Buddha's soldiers, like those rascals who plundered us by the black skin *yurts*. Eh?"

Namki smoked until the pipe guttered, then tucked it away and leaned forward. He put a lean finger to the dust and made lines, and presently spoke.

"Master, it is not like the old days when God ruled everything. Now there is no God, and men do as they please. The living Buddha is obeyed, true, but strangers are in the land. You were sick and you could not ride to Urga with Redchin. That was well! That was good luck."

"How so?"

Hume knit his brows, with a stirring of anger.

"Perhaps Redchin was murdered, and I do not want to see you dead, master," said Namki with perfect frankness. "Who would he meet? Soldiers in red coats, wearing the swastika of the Living Buddha. Yellow soldiers wearing silver dragons, Chinese who serve the Buddha. Russians who serve the Buddha. Who else? Red Russians from the north and east, or nameless men from the Gobi to the south. Every one wanders across the plains, master."

"What are you driving at?" demanded Hume. "You think Patrick is dead?"

"I do not think so," said Namki. "Redchin does not ride fast, like a Tatar, killing his horses, covering a hundred miles in a day! He is a small man, cunning, very crafty, putting forth his guile upon other men, now flying like a bird, now squirming like a snake. He is not tall and strong and great like you, master. Listen! You are sorry because your friends are dead and your expedition destroyed, but I am not sorry. Why? Because there remains Redchin, who is very wise; and with him you, who are tall and strong; and me, a wanderer ejected from his own tribe and lands, who knows all things and from whom these mountains have no secrets. Perhaps, master, good luck awaits us three. We have rifles and horses. Redchin will bring horses——"

The Kalmuck broke off abruptly, cocking his head to one side as if he heard something. Hume could hear only the wind in the high trees. He studied the flat brown face of Namki, wondering why this man had remained faithful when all others had deserted, wondering why this Kalmuck had persisted in linking his fate to that of two white wanderers who could not even pay for his services.

It had been different in the beginning, of course. Then Hume had been pouring out money; there were camels and horses, a baggage-train, a motor-truck, many servants. There were Smith and Zandt, botanist and naturalist; there were plenty of supplies, even luxuries, and good pay for all men.

Now all this was swept away in the whirlwind. A mob of Russian reds had attacked the expedition. A band of unruly Mongolian cavalry had come and plundered. Then, crowning disaster, the Chinese bandits—a wild horde from the Gobi to the south, looters and murderers. Zandt and Smith had gone down, the men had scattered; only luck and good horses had saved Patrick and Hume and Namki.

"What sort of good luck can await us?" queried Hume in scorn. "This is a land of nameless men, wanderers, murderers. Raiders from every quarter sweep over the steppes. The caravan-route of Jenghis Khan is closed, by Russian bandits, Chinese bandits, Mongol bandits. What sort of luck do you dream about, Namki?"

The eyes of the Kalmuck brightened and glittered in the ember-glow.

"Gold," he said swiftly. "Gold and fair women and the joy of conquest! Gold and fair women and battle! The three best things in the world, master, for the three of us. Am I a poor wizard? Wait and see. Wait only a little while, an hour, a few moments! Why did my words send Redchin off to Urga, eh? Wait and see!"

Hume only shrugged to that, put an ember to his pipe, and stared again into the fire. He had no faith in the wizardry of Namki, although there had been times when wonder grew within him. Just now he had no faith in anything, and was without hope.

True, his body was well enough. A bad cliff-fall had caused fever and contusions, but that was over. He missed wise old

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Patrick; felt certain the man was dead. The coldly desolate mountains weighed upon him oppressively. He was lonely and heartsick.

Suddenly, on the hillside above the camp, a rotten birch crackled and smashed down in the cold wind. An instant later, as if this had been some signal, Namki leaped to his feet, a wild cry bursting from him, impetuous words on his lips:

"Quick, master! Your rifle—quick! Redchin comes, and men ride in pursuit of him. Be ready!"

Swift as he usually was to respond to any warning, Hume was taken off guard. He stared at Namki, saw the Kalmuck catch up rifle and vanish; then heard his voice addressing the horses, and realized that Namki was getting them away.

Then Hume acted. The camp was made near a spring in a deep valley, which was here only a hundred feet wide at the bottom. Rifle in hand, the three remaining precious cartridges in its magazine, Hume gained the trees on the hillside and lay there, waiting. Still he could hear nothing save the rush of wind. Namki and the horses had quite disappeared. Below, the red embers of the fire showed the dim outline of their brush-hut to one side.

Then, suddenly, Hume caught the pounding thud of hoofs, and drew tense. Was this really Jim Patrick—had the Kalmuck made a wild guess? He found himself staring down at three horses which swept up to the embers and halted there. Three horses and one man—was it Patrick? Yet it must be. No other man would ride into this mountain notch unless for reason.

The chuckling laugh of Patrick answered his mental questionings, then Patrick's voice leaped out.

"Hullo , folks! Hume—Namki—look alive! It's all right. We've time to talk."

Hume rushed from hiding, shaking hands frantically with the friend whom he had thought dead. Patrick was a small man indeed, very sharp in the face, about his thin lips a bristly stubble of grayish-red beard; his eyes were keen and piercing, his leathery face was deeply lined, he was tottering on his feet with weariness, and threw himself down by the fire, panting.

"Build it up, quick!" he said, and pointed to the fire.

From the shadows the figure of Namki materialized grinning, and shoved wood on the embers. Hume glanced at the horses. Two of them were breathing deeply, winded, packs on their backs. The third, foam-lathered like the others, stood with feet braced apart and head down. Namki jerked at the bridle but could not make the poor brute move. The others followed him readily enough, and he led them away.

"Lord, but I'm glad to see you!" breathed Hume, staring. "Thought you were gone."

Patrick rolled over, produced a cigaret with trembling fingers, lighted it from a burning stick, then flung a tin of American tobacco at Hume, who scooped it up.

"Proof that I went to Urga," he said, and grimaced. "Whew! I'm sore and stiff. Got any cartridges left?"

"Three." Hume touched his rifle.

"Enough. Get my gun off that beast, will you? I'm done up."

Hume turned to the saddle and removed a rifle from its boot. The Kalmuck appeared, and began to examine the drooping head of the horse. He turned to Hume with a shrug.

"Done for, master. The brain is gone. You have more cartridges there?"

"Give him the rifle," said Patrick, and Hume handed the weapon to Namki. "Now, quick! Make a dummy by the fire."

Hume asked no questions. He saw the figure of the Kalmuck glide away and vanish and then worked swiftly making up a dummy figure from sticks and blankets and an extra skin coat. The result was not artistic, though fairly natural.

"No time to waste," said Patrick, "but they were a couple of miles behind me, so we're all right."

"Who?" demanded Hume.

"Russian raiders—reds, probably. Struck a big bunch of them twenty miles back and they caught me." Patrick grinned, but not in mirth. "Shades of Ulysses, how I lied! They took me for a special commissioner from Chita. All went well. The captain embraced me and set up the drinks."

"Oh!" said Hume sadly, and frowned. "Again, old chap?"

"Well, I'm human, and I like good liquor," said Patrick. "I can't help the tricks it plays me, can I? I'm an old man, remember, and I needed a jolt. This time, it played the usual trick and I talked too much. I don't remember just what happened, except that there was a row. While I got away all right, about dark three

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of the devils picked me up and kept on my trail——"

He leaned his ear to the ground, then with unexpected agility started up.

"Coming! Get hid. I can't shoot—too trembly. Get 'em!"

He was gone on the word, and Hume made all haste to regain his covert. Beside the fire stood the spent horse, legs far apart, white with lather, head down, flanks and barrel slowly quivering and aheave; to one side the dummy gave fair resemblance of a wearied man sitting asleep over his fire, whose flickering tongues gave singular effect to the figure.

Hume waited, his thoughts dwelling on Jim Patrick. Once more, the old story! Liquor had done some queer things to Patrick in his day, some queer and bitter things, yet the lesson would never be learned.

Coming! A muffled rattle of hoofs, and then silence. He could picture the three raiders there in the darkness, horses suddenly pulled up, all staring at the flickering fire and what it betrayed. Hume smiled and settled himself comfortably.

Moments passed in silence until, without warning, a red flash sent the crashing report of a rifle volleying up the gorge. Another and another—three of them. The dummy beside the fire slowly toppled over and lay prostrate, but the horse, unhurt, did not move. Then stealing figures below, the three men closing in on the presumably murdered man, the low sound of a laugh whirled aloft——

The rifle in Hume's hands belched its message. From the rocks across the gorge, that of Namki thundered a response. One man screamed terribly, until the scream was cut short by a bullet. Lead rained into the valley floor, pelted the rocks and spurted the dirt, went screaming away in ricochet from boulder and cliff. Echoes rolled and quavered and fled on the wind, and after a little Hume realized that hoofbeats were fleeing away in mad panic.

One of the three had got clear after all.

RESTED and recovered, Patrick opened up the saddlebags he had fetched from Urga, while Namki set strips of fresh meat from a mountain-sheep at the fire, and David Hume stuffed his pipe with real tobacco and watched them. An hour had passed. The two captured horses had been placed with the others, the two dead Russians had been buried; there was peace in the mountain valley.

"Everything here we need—let the work wait." Patrick flung himself down and lighted a cigaret. "Did Namki tell you that he'd sent me to Urga?"

Hume nodded. Patrick grinned and brushed his palm across his chin.

"Gad! Must shave in the morning. Namki is a liar, for he didn't send me, but one of his wild stories did. Hume, I saw a terrible thing on my way back here! Some of those —— bandits had caught a caravan of Chinese traders and settlers; the river was full of dead men and women, up and down the banks, scores of them! In one place thirty women had been deliberately shot down. I couldn't sleep for seeing it——"

He broke off, puffed nervously a moment.

"That's nothing new in this country," commented Hume, though his eyes were somber.

"Sure, sure, only I'm a Virginian and not a Kalmuck," said Patrick.

He held out his left hand, on which was displayed a gold ring set with a bit of yellow jade; in the stone were carved a swastika and the sacred *vajra* emblem.

"Got this from Prince Jassaktu, one of the head boys in Urga. It will take us safely through the whole country, so far as the Mongols are concerned."

There was a slight sound. Namki stood there staring at the ring, and caught his breath as he stared. Patrick chuckled.

"See him? Recognizes it."

"What kind of diplomacy have you been practising now?" asked Hume.

Patrick settled himself more comfortably. His lined features became a mask from which glittered his eyes, brilliant and crafty and full of energy. He flicked his cigaret into the fire and fastened his gaze on Hume.

"Dave, we were up against it proper, with you sick," he said quietly. "I went to that monastery we passed, over in the hills, and ran a tall bluff. It was a slim hope, but the lamas swallowed the bait. There have been prophecies in this country, you know, about a man with white skin and red hair who would come to make the Mongols a great nation."

David Hume nodded over his pipe and made a slight gesture. Namki turned the meat, and following the gesture, Jim Patrick

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observed the Kalmuck squatted beside the fire. He grimaced, and continued in English as he had begun.

"All right—this is the prolog. Don't want to shock him. Well, the bluff—you understand? A matter of necessity, Dave."

"You know my feelings," said Hume quietly. "I don't like you to monkey with religious affairs, that's all. Even if we're in a fix, it's bad medicine. You're playing prophet?"

"No—merely insinuating. I was desperate, Dave!" responded Patrick earnestly.

Then he leaned back, and began to speak in Mongolian, that Namki might understand.

"The lamas sent me to Urga and got me an audience. I couldn't see the Buddha, of course, but I got pretty close to him; and I stirred things up, I tell you! It was diplomacy and no mistake. The cursed city was full of spies—Chinese, Japs, Reds, Whites, Tibetan and so forth. I'm afraid that the Chinese are on my trail, for they don't want to see the Mongol kingdom any further established."

When the meat was sufficiently cooked, Namki brought it to them. Patrick wrenched open a tin of English biscuit which he had brought. Queer man! Hume silently reflected on this friend of his while the meal progressed and the tale awaited a more propitious time for its telling. It was like Patrick to bring along a luxury or two, when bare necessities were so badly needed.

Whatever the man had been up to, Hume reserved judgment until he should have heard the story in full. And now that Patrick was back, he began to appreciate the Kalmuck's train of reasoning. Neither he nor Namki could long survive alone in this country; only the keen, sly, brave wits of Patrick could hope to turn ruin into victory, disaster into glory. And half of Jim Patrick's craftiness was no more than the ability to turn human nature to his own advantage. The man was more than cunning; he was very wise.

"Now, wizard," said Patrick, when he had finished his meal, "tell David Hume the story that you told me while he was sick—unless you have already told him."

The Kalmuck shook his head. His eyes were glowing strangely.

"Master," he said to Hume, "I am not a liar, as you called me in jest. I told Redchin the tale of a place I once saw among the mountains northwest of here. First there is a mountain; it is not high, and it has a flat top, and on the top there sits a demon in whose hand is the book of men's fate. The Buriats and other Mongol tribes hold this mountain sacred. Any man or beast ascending it is struck dead by the demon. Only those who are of the blood of Jenghis Khan may ascend this mountain. This is truth, for I myself chased a mountain-sheep up the slopes, saw the sheep fall dead, and went back."

Hume stuffed his pipe, listening to this atrocious legend gravely.

"Perhaps you had forgotten to sacrifice to the demon," he suggested.

"Not so, master. I am no fool," said Namki. "However, this mountain has nothing to do with the story, except that beyond it there is a lake called Dzu Nor, which burns every night with a red flame that can be seen from afar. Demons live there, and men without souls, who come forth at night from caverns under the earth; nobody goes near that lake. However, the Dzu Nor has nothing to do with the story, except that beyond it there lies a narrow valley, which presently becomes wide and fertile, and in that valley live some Russians, who fled there years ago out of Siberia and remained there. They are peaceful men of some strange religion. No one knows about them, no one goes near that place, because of the mountain and the lake."

Hume puffed reflectively at his pipe. He really disliked to pin the Kalmuck down to facts, since he enjoyed the myth and legend in which the man was steeped. None the less, he was uneasy and disturbed by Jim Patrick's evident interest in this wild story.

"If no man knows about these Russians," he said curtly, "how do you then know?"

Namki grinned.

"Master, I went past that mountain and that lake because I was a fool and had not heard the truth about them. Also, I was starving and on the trail of some kabarga antelope; and it was Winter, so that the lake was frozen, and it was daylight, so that I did not see the demons and the flame. I did, however, sacrifice to whatever demon owned that spot. Doubtless, it was this that preserved me. I found the Russians, or they found me and fed me, and after two weeks I came away. They had much gold, some of which they gave me; because I was

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a wizard they respected me, and I swore that I would not tell my tribe about their place. This was before my people cast me out. However, all this has nothing to do with the reason that sent Redchin to Urga."

Hume nodded and puffed at his pipe, and waited. The Kalmuck resumed.

"I was telling this story to Redchin the night after you were hurt and became sick, master, and I chanced to tell him of a strange thing I found in that valley. There was a place where a huge black rock rose out of the valley, as high as a skin tent, and it was split into many pieces——"

"Decomposed slate," jerked in the voice of Patrick.

"—and each morning when dew had fallen," went on Namki, "or after a rain, this black rock and all its pieces were covered with writing, which vanished when it was dry. It was strange writing which even I, who am a wizard and can read Tibetan, could not read. Still, it looked much like Tibetan. So, when Redchin heard all this story, he went quickly away to Urga—and I think I know why he went."

With this, Namki grinned at Patrick, stuffed some tobacco into his bone pipe, and signified that his story was ended. Hume looked up at his friend.

"What's behind all this farrago of nonsense?" he asked quietly.

"Truth," said Patrick.

He leaned forward, lighted a fresh cigaret, and gazed intently at Hume. His earnestness, his tremendous conviction, were obvious.

"You're a fair-minded man. Will you hear me out, and argue afterward?"

Hume jerked his head in assent. Patrick, drawing down his bushy red brows, puffed his cigaret alight and then began to speak.

"You've heard the famous Mongol legend about the Black Stone, of course?"

To this Hume again assented, though with a frown of thoughtful concentration. Now he began to see a ray of light, for the story of the famous Black Stone was history, so far as the Mongols were concerned. It was a miraculous stone sent to the khan of the Kalmucks by the Dalai Lama in Tibet—a stone which carried a blessing, and by which the lamas could accurately tell fortunes. Upon it appeared magic predictions in the Tibetan tongue.

He remembered the story; how the last khan, seeing all his power destroyed by the Manchu emperors of China, fled to Russia and deposited the Black Stone in Urga. Under its blessing the Mongol people waxed fat and great—the stone even entered into Occidental history, since a certain story connected it with the first Czar Alexander. However, it was stolen from Urga, and after that day the Mongols declined in power and wealth; since that day, not Mongols alone, but Buddhists generally, are said to have been continually searching for it throughout the world.

Remembering his promise, Hume checked the shocked protest which rose to his lips, and motioned Patrick to continue. Patrick obeyed, his blue eyes aflame.

"I went to Urga, undertook to recover the famous Black Stone or a duplicate of it from the demon world, and to make a long story short, have a commission to do so from the Living Buddha himself. The document's in that case, in my saddlebags. Also, Prince Jassaktu gave me this ring, which will gain us help and hospitality from any monastery or any lama or Mongol chief. I have three months in which to make good, and gave my sacred word of honor to report in Urga before that time, or to the Hutuktu in Zain, which is a good deal closer. Also, Dave, I shall keep that promise."

Patrick again puffed his cigaret alight. Hume, inspecting him closely, comprehended that the man was speaking in perfect sincerity, and breathed more freely.

"Now, you're a scientist," went on Patrick, "therefore let me expound to you this tale of Namki's as I read it. First, the mountain! Not a legend, but actual fact. Only very tall men, such as those descended direct from Jenghis Khan, may ascend it safely; ordinary Buriats or small animals can't do so. Why? This country runs along the edge of the Siberian coal-deposits. Fissures in the mountain exhale carbonic-acid gas, which forms a belt close to the ground and kills all living things within the pale. Such places exist elsewhere in the world, so why not here? Will you grant me this, so far?"

Hume's gaze was more intent now.

"Granted," he said, a stir of interest in his voice. "Not only possible, but extremely probable, Pat. Score one for you! Next?"

"Next," and Patrick's blue eyes fairly burned, "is the Dzu Nor, the lake of demons and red flame, which frightens off the shepherds. Shall we stick to geology? Very

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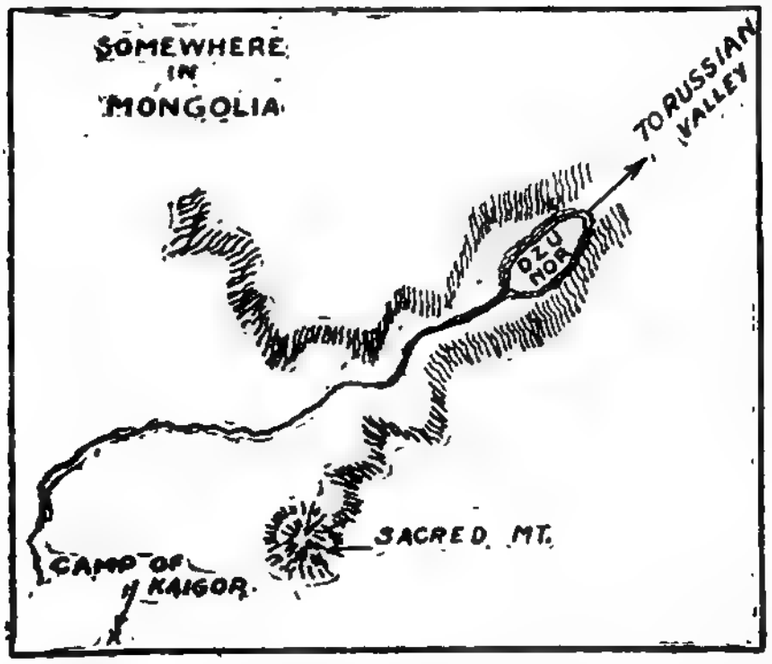
well. The very simple answer is—oil! Remember where you found surface oil in that lake near the Narabanchi monastery? Same in the Dzu Nor. Those Russians set it afire each year after the ice goes out, or keep it afire through the Winter—no matter which—as a matter of protection. It keeps their isolation perfect. Eh?"



"Score two for you," said Hume. "Next?"

"Those Russians themselves. Their existence is not improbable, for many such small sects fled across the border into Mongolia, under the czars. Instance the Soyot colonies west of Irkutsk. Instance the Cossack crowd who came to Pekin, and whose celestial progeny are still blue-eyed and fair of hair! Grant me this?"

"Upon my word," and Hume's wide lips relaxed whimsically, "you are setting up a case that's hard to argue! Next?"

"The outcrop of decomposed slate which Namki mentions having found in the valley. Picture a fragment from that very spot passing through the hands of *shamans* and wizards, across the Gobi, from one monastery to another, finally reaching the high wizard in Tibet—the Dalai Lama! He sends it to the khan of the Olets, or Kalmucks, back in Mongolia. Upon this stone, whenever it is wet, appear magic words—taken to be Tibetan, naturally, which only highly educated lamas could read or pretend to read. What more do you want?"

"An explanation," said Hume. "This writing——"

"Go back to geology and call it fungi, or lichens. Eh?"

Hume frowned and shook his head.

"I am not sure, but under the circumstances I think not."

"Why?" shot out Patrick.

"In such case, the writing would appear in the opposite way—when the stone was dry. It might vanish when wet. Besides, fungi are not in the realm of geology."

Patrick turned on Namki and fired a furious question at him. The Kalmuck responded that he might have been mistaken; these things had happened years previously, and the writing might have appeared when the stone was dry. He was not certain of the details.

"But doesn't the thing itself sound plausible?" demanded Patrick, turning back to Hume with eager words. "Don't you see how the whole thing works out? We get that stone, or a good slab of it, and turn it in. Dave, you know the stories that we've heard, from good sources, about the wealth of the Living Buddha in Urga! And I've just been there. I tell you, man, we can not only get out of this country alive, but we can have any thing we ask from the lamas, if we make good!"

"By playing on the religious credulity and superstition of men?" said Hume quietly.

"Get rid of your prejudice," snapped Patrick. "Be fair-minded, Dave! I leave the issue in your hands entirely—you make the decision. We go into the place of demons, as that valley is known. We bring out a bit of that decomposed slate, and turn it over. Just that! We don't play on anybody's religious credulity—we simply go after a thing that the lamas would give their eye-teeth for, and can't get for themselves! We supply a want—we fill a gap—we furnish something for which there's a —— of a demand in Urga! No fake, no lies, no nothing; a purely commercial enterprise. If the lamas like it, we win. And you can depend upon it, that they'll know what that ancient Black Stone looked like! I said, you know, that we would produce either the original stone or else one of the same kind. They figure we have to get it in the demon world. I figure we don't. Now make your decision, and I'll abide by it. Are we going or not?"

"Sleep on it," said Hume laconically.

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II

IN THE light of early morning, David Hume stood and looked at his sleeping friend. Namki was already far afield in search of fresh meat.

Regarding those lined features, that body which was so small for the mighty soul it housed, the slender, nervous hand on which shone the yellow jade ring, Hume mused on the paradox which had led Jim Patrick down the years empty-handed to old age. He, who could work on other men as a potter shapes clay on the wheel, could not acquire worldly pelf or a settled station. He was a wanderer, always glad of the world, blowing before the wind with a jest; and after all, who was Patrick to be judged by the standards of other men?

Under that gaze Patrick stirred, and suddenly sat bolt upright, his stark blue eyes astare.

"Morning!" he exclaimed. "What's the answer? Do we go or stay?"

"Go," said Hume. "Get up and eat, and pack. When Namki comes back, we start."

Patrick was up with a shout, clapped Hume staggeringly on the back, and then was gone for the brook, running like a boy despite his fifty years. Singing, shivering, shouting under the impact of the icy water, he bathed swiftly, dressed, and returned to the brush shelter, a glow of vivid health in his cheeks. Hume had brewed tea, and the two men sat down together to their meal. Then Patrick, who ever held something in reserve, spoke out.

"Didn't mention it last night," he said, his mouth full, "but I think Prince Kaigor is after me. You've heard of the Noyon? Kaigor Beyli is an Altai Tatar lama who helped in the slaughter of the Chinese armies a couple of years ago and was made a prince. Stands high. He's a rascal, greedy for money and women and such things. A Ta Lama, too—witch-doctor."

Hume's brows lifted slightly.

"I've heard of him as a cruel and blood-stained devil, yes. Said to be a big magician. But why the deuce should he be after you? Did you offend him?"

"No. He's a traitor, in Chinese pay." Patrick swallowed some scalding tea and grimaced. "Man, this country is a welter of treachery on every side! The Chinese are doing their level best to pull down the Mongols—they're deathly afraid of these tribes. I was given a strong hint that Kaigor Beyli was after me, that's all. Hullo, here's Namki back again, with a kabarga! That's good."

The Kalmuck appeared on the hillside above and swiftly joined them, bearing about his neck the body of a tiny antelope. He grinned at the two men, flung down the body, and bent over it with his knife, cutting up the meat. Hume and Patrick fell to work packing. Scarcely a word was passed among the three until the horses stood loaded and saddled. Then Hume demanded their route, and the Kalmuck made curt response.

"I know the way, master. In three days we shall reach the sacred mountain. Come!"

He leaped into the saddle and struck off up the gorge, into the heart of the mountains.

As they rode, Jim Patrick retailed a huge crop of gossip which he had picked up in Urga. The old Living Buddha was dead—poisoned, some said, by the Chinese, although that was unlikely, since the sons of Han are as children before the artful poisoners of the red lamas. More likely, he had displeased the Dalai Lama in Tibet. At all events, a young man now sat in his place.

Peace was made with the soviets, according to one rumor; another said that an uprising of the Chinese Mohammedans was soon to take place, aided by the Mongols. Urga was opening to foreign capital, and many Russians were there. Chinese armies were on the march to wipe out the Mongol nation. The tomb of Jenghis Khan in the Pamirs had been profaned. Rumors, prophecies, visions ran riot. Only one thing was certain in all this—old Asia was heaving, and her flanks were red with blood already.

Hume paid little heed to this flow of talk, riding onward in silence, his eyes watchful on the rocky slopes that hemmed them in, his thoughts busied less with Urga than with the present errand. That it was a mad one, he felt perfectly certain; even did that ring gain them Mongol protection, it would avail nothing against the outlanders who surged across the steppes from every quarter.

Late in the afternoon they were high among the mountains, following some unseen trail known only to Namki, slowly climbing a bleak pass where the cold wind

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whistled eternally. The climb had been abrupt. Shortly before sunset, Namki begged for the binoculars which Hume carried, and made a minute search of the country behind and below them.

"See any one?" demanded Hume, when the glasses were returned in silence.

"No, master." Namki jerked his head. "But I saw birds fly up from the offal of that antelope I brought in this morning. Those Russians are following and have reached our camp. They will come faster tomorrow."

"Then we must evade them—lose our trail?"

"We shall see. Let us get over this pass before dark."

They pushed ahead, wearily, and an hour later were across the pass and camped in a high gorge of red rock, with a torrent of melted snow rushing past. Here, while the two white men smoked their pipes, Namki produced some birds' bones from a pouch and began to mutter over them, playing with ashes from the fire and talking to himself. He was still at this when Hume rolled up in his blanket and went to sleep.

With dawn, Hume wakened Patrick.

"Better make your plans for the day," he said grimly. "Those Russians can't be far back of us, and they'll hang on like grim death."

Namki came up to the two, grinning widely.

"We go straight on," he announced. "My father Redchin will attend to those men."

Patrick stared at him.

"How the —— will I do that?"

"You will understand when we meet certain persons."

"More of his cursed conjury," exclaimed Hume angrily. "What say, Pat? Shall I——"

Patrick yawned.

"Oh, let's give him a chance. After all, we're in the land of wizardy, so why worry? I'm more afraid of Kaigor Beyli and his Chinese than I am of those poor ——s of Russians. They're only looters. Kaigor Beyli is out for blood."

Hume shrugged and turned to the fire. He was heartsick of this land of blood and misery, and heartbroken to boot, for the wonderful discoveries were all gone, scattered to the four winds, and with them his little fortune. At thirty he was, so far as worldly wealth was concerned, back where he had started from. He had no faith in Namki's wizardy or in Patrick's quest of the fabulous black stone, which seemed to him an absurdity. He was drifting aimlessly, indulging his friend in this search, against which he had some scruples, in a sort of weary lassitude. He was past caring much about anything. He was drifting.

All that morning the three companions traveled down the gorge, which widened into a great and barren valley where they saw no living thing, though undoubtedly the mountains soaring on every hand of them concealed monasteries and black *yurts* and nomad flocks. Wild and desolate was the rocky horizon, and Hume conjectured that they were crossing a small plateau into which the valley had merged, for more mountains rose ahead. Shortly after noon, however, there occurred an astonishing event which left Hume bewildered and silent.

Straight toward them across the now level grazing-land came two men at a gallop. Even at a distance, while they galloped furiously, Hume perceived that these were singularly abnormal men; and as they drew closer he stared at them in wondering comprehension. One was a huge creature, eight feet in height and built proportionately, his features brutish and unintelligent; a high fur cap increased the effect of supernatural tallness. Before now, however, Hume had encountered the gigantic descendants of Jenghis Khan, and it was rather at the other man that he stared.

For this second rider was a gay and splendid object, garbed from cap to boots in flaming yellow. His coat, gay with coiling dragons, was of imperial silk, heavy as canvas; the sash which half-concealed an automatic pistol at his hip was of peach-pink broidered with gold; a jade and amber rosary was on his left wrist, and even his horse-trappings were studded with coral and turquoise and lacquer. This man approached with hand uplifted, allowing his gigantic companion to fall a step in the rear.

"Who are you?" he demanded, his sharply intellectual features offering a keen contrast to those of the giant.

In response, Jim Patrick held up his hand to show the ring; before he could speak the Mongol broke into a sudden laugh of recognition.

"Oh, I have heard of you. I am Ghegen

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Bolon Hutuktu, and I came to meet you. My monastery is there," and he waved a hand toward the mountains on the right. "You are safe in my lands."

Hume stared in some astonishment at this "living god," one of the many local reincarnations of deity who are subject only to the Living Buddha at Urga. How was it possible that this Hutuktu could have heard of them? Patrick had come post-haste from Urga and no messengers could have preceded him. This was only another of the many Mongolian mysteries, however, and Hume did not question the truth of the matter. Not so Patrick.

"If you have heard of us," he responded craftily, "then you have heard of our errand."

"Certainly," came the prompt reply. "If it is written that you regain the Black Stone, then you will do it. Will you come and visit me? I shall be greatly pleased."

Patrick declined the offer with thanks, then laughed.

"I advise you to get back to your monastery in all haste, Bolon Hutuktu, and see that men guard the walls, for I think there is something that you have not heard after all."

"Eh?" The incarnated god frowned heavily. "This is my territory, and it is safe. My men are well-armed with rifles."

"No doubt," said Patrick. "But other men have rifles too, and are trailing us. They are red Russian marauders, and would like nothing better than to loot your monastery."

The local deity smiled slightly, then lifted his eyes and for a moment looked fixedly at the mountains. Suddenly he shifted his gaze to Patrick, and nodded his head.

"In one hour," he said, "draw rein and listen."

He whirled his horse, spat a word at his gigantic follower, and the two of them went dashing away at full gallop, flinging over their shoulders the "*Sayn baynal*" of farewell. Hume watched them as they spurred mercilessly and lashed their horses to speed, then he turned and saw Namki laughing silently.

"What did I say?" demanded the Kalmuck. "Did I not say that my father Redchin would attend to those Russians? Forward!"

Patrick fingered his beard and gave Hume a side glance.

"—— take me," he muttered uneasily, "if I didn't forget this rascal's prophecy! It came into my mind that this local deity would like nothing better than to get his men and finish off those Russians. Besides, it was up to him to insure our safety so far as he could do it."

Hume only nodded to this.

"He seemed to know all about us, Pat."

"Call it telepathy," said Patrick, with a twist of his body in the saddle. "Call it any cursed thing you like, so long as our skirts are cleared. That big chap was one of the Jenghis breed, eh? How old Phineas T. Barnum would have liked to snap him up! Let's go on."

The three rode on, in deep silence.

An hour afterward, with a dark rift in the mountains opening ahead of them, Namki drew rein and turned to the two friends. The usual grin was on his face.

"What did I say, master?" he said, addressing Hume. "Is not my father Redchin a wise and crafty badger, eh?"

"What do you mean?" demanded Hume, irritated.

The Kalmuck lifted his head.

"Do as that living god commanded us, for the time is up. Listen!"

In the silence they heard a distant crepitation, a muttering outburst of sound. Nothing was in sight. In a moment the far rifle-fire died away and dwindled to nothing.

"The ——!"

Hume gazed around at the horizon, bleak and desolate and unbroken by any life.

"No, the Hutuktu," said Patrick, and chuckled. "Though perhaps the devil had a finger in, all the same. Let's get away from here. Those Russians are dead, but I don't like the place."

They rode forward again.

III

CAMPED that night in a mountain valley, towering rock-walls on every hand, Jim Patrick communed with his cigaret for a while and then suddenly summoned the Kalmuck to him. Namki came and squatted down, his hard little bird's eyes flitting curiously. Hume, asking no questions, wondered slightly at Patrick's manner; by tacit consent, Patrick was the leader of the three, at least for the present. Hume was in no mood to assert himself and cared little what happened. At the same

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time, his friend seemed in a very singular mood.

"Namki," said Patrick abruptly, "You understand that, if we are not killed, we shall do what we came to do and then leave this country, while you remain here."

The Kalmuck was uneasy, but nodded assent.

"And," continued Patrick, "you would like very much to spend the remainder of your days in glory and honor and wealth, feared by all men. That is why you are taking us to the sacred mountain and the lake Dzu Nor, and the valley beyond, where the Black Stone is. After we go away you, as one of us, will be honored and feared. You will be known as one of the three men who brought the Black Stone from the land of demons."

Namki's eyes narrowed a trifle, as he nodded again and produced his bone pipe.

"That is why," said Patrick, a smile playing about his lips, "you are taking us to the mountain, which you expect that we will climb, and to the lake, where you expect that we will pass the demons. Possibly you might even advertise your expectancies, so that men will be sure to know what is done."

Namki, busily filling his pipe, made no response to this. He appeared a trifle abashed.

"So," concluded Patrick blandly, "we are going elsewhere."

At this, Hume started. Namki leaned forward, took an ember from the fire, and held it to the bone bowl of his pipe. After a moment he dropped the ember, puffed stolidly, and then glanced up at Patrick, who was watching him keenly enough.

"I do not understand, my father," he said.

"But I do," and Patrick chuckled. "It is no secret where we expect to find the stone. I had to tell the story in Urga. The princes know that we shall get it from the underworld of demons, or from that lake, which to them is the same thing. Kaigor Beyli and his Chinese friends will be waiting for us. It is all very well to come out that way; in fact, we must do so, just as we must climb the sacred mountain, in order to prove that we are under the divine protection. However, that can take care of itself. For the present, I want to reach the valley of the Black Stone, and I think that you can take us there by a back way. You lied when you said that you went past the mountain and the lake. You stumbled into that valley by some back entrance, and you're going to take us there the same way. So forget all your plans of publicity and settle down to business."

Namki blinked at the firelight and puffed his little pipe nervously. Hume, to whom this ultimatum of Patrick's was a complete surprize, could not repress a smile at the signs of inward confusion and dismay which the Kalmuck betrayed to his eye. Obviously, Jim Patrick had hit the nail on the head.

Not until the pipe sucked dry did Namki speak. Then he looked up and met the steady gaze of Patrick, and blinked again.

"Redchin, you are very crafty," he said in a humble voice. "I am by no means a fool, yet when you set a net for me I fall into it. What you say is true. Tomorrow night we will be in that valley, though the road is hard and we can not take the horses."

"Good," said Patrick, and darted at Hume a glance of whimsical exultation.

Namki rose and slid off into the darkness. After a moment Hume broke the silence.

"Good head, Pat. How did you guess?"

"Mulled it over a bit, and ran a bluff on the little rascal," said Patrick complacently. "Besides, I get cold chills thinking of Kaigor Beyli. Sharpens my brain. We'll have to come out of that place the front way for the sake of the general effect; there'll be plenty on the watch, never fear! Then is when Kaigor will catch us, and you'll have to get busy."

"But, if the Mongols will be watching, how would Kaigor and his Chinese dare to touch——"

"Ambush," said Patrick curtly. "The Tatars will keep a few men scattered out as videttes, no more. Kaigor will lie hidden, perhaps miles away from the lake or mountain, to catch us either coming or going. If he gets us with the stone, he'll kill us and destroy it. He's a Mongol prince himself, you know, and all this I'm spilling is inside stuff. He is not advertising himself as a traitor, understand. But I'm deathly afraid of him. Well, here's hoping that tomorrow night we'll be in the back door!"

Hume shrugged once more and sought his blanket. He was more than skeptical about the whole affair, nor did Patrick's vision of huge rewards stir him in the least. He valued money only as a means toward the

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end of scientific achievement; and the complete disaster which had crowned his recent expedition left him almost in a state of apathy.

With the morning he put to Jim Patrick a question which bothered him.

"Last night, Pat, you said that we had to climb that sacred mountain after we got the Stone. Why? What's to prevent our getting the Stone and returning by the back way?"

Jim Patrick rubbed his nose, which indicated a disturbance of mind.

"Just my own foolishness, Dave. I'm afraid I rather emphasized our ability to perform the difficult. Not that a crowd will be waiting to see us, or anything of that sort; but on the top of the mountain there's one of the Jenghis tribe said to be living. We're to bring a sign from him that we've been there. I don't even know what the sign is. I suppose we'll be watched, of course, but——"

"Confound it, you're worse than Namki!" broke out Hume angrily. "Why the —— did you have to drag in all this mummery? It's absurd. You don't know what this sign is? Why, the whole thing's crazy!"

"I know it," said Patrick uncomfortably. Hume, suddenly contrite, laughed and gripped the shoulders of the older man affectionately.

"Beg your pardon for flying out that way, old fellow! I'm like a bear with a sore head. Forgive me and forget it."

Hume turned away. Patrick looked after him, and in the man's keenly piercing eyes there lay a deep fund of sympathetic comprehension. In that leathery countenance those blue eyes gleamed and glowed, with sorrow and friendship and love; it was not for nothing that he and David Hume had suffered and fought and companioned together.

When they started out that morning, Namki led them abruptly from the rocky valley they were following, up over the mountain flanks, following an unerring instinct that was surer than any trail. The Kalmuck led the way, and only once, when Patrick grunted out a profane protest against the rough climbing, did he look back; then it was with a grin, and a word which was decidedly mocking.

"Gold and fair women and battle!" said he, with a glitter in his beady eyes. "And, if I am not mistaken, death also. These things lie ahead of us. Are they not worth a little work? Gold and fair women and battle!"

Patrick cursed under his breath and uttered no further protest. A cynical smile touched the lips of Hume at this Kalmuck's notion of life's greatest aspirations. Gold and fair women and battle, indeed! For him, at least, it was a trinity shrined in hollow mockery, and he had no faith in Namki's promises. He was here for Patrick's sake, and for the sake of furthering Patrick's wild dream, or so he told himself.

At midday, however, Hume was given a surprizing token of Namki's absolute faith in their mission. They had reached a tiny and secluded glade, and halted for a quick repast; here Namki coolly announced that they would abandon the horses, carry what they could on their backs, and go forward on foot.

Like any other Mongol, the Kalmuck afoot was like a fish out of water. The most expert of horsemen, he was miserably awkward and impotent when forced to trust to shank's mare. This, beyond doubt, had been one of his reasons for keeping quiet about the "back way" into the valley; but, since Patrick had stripped away his mask, the mere fact that Namki proposed leaving the horses behind showed his entire confidence in what lay ahead.

The two white men accepted the situation without comment, and at once fell to making up the loads, of which cartridges formed the bulk; in this land, a rifle spelled life or death. What they could not take was securely cached in a tree for safety against wolves, and in an hour the three men were striking out afoot. As Namki explained, they must follow the trail by which a mountain-sheep had led him into the valley of the Russian folk.

There was no trail, however; only a descent down steep rock faces and then one perilous traverse of a loose talus slope overhanging a tremendous abyss, which left all three men shaken. To every appearance their quest was vain. On all sides were the desolate rock peaks, and off to the west the snowy crests of the Tarbagetai drove icy spears at Heaven, while the southern horizon was uplifted by the titanic masses of the Grand Altai. Mid-afternoon found them at the lip of an abrupt precipice, veiled below them by a fleecy cloud, and Namki grinned as he uncoiled the hide rope which he had brought along.

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"Gold and fair women and battle—and also death," he sang out. "Tie the thong, and follow, Redchin! Are you afraid?"

"Yes, —— you!" growled Patrick, as he looped the line about his waist. "All ready."

"They have good liquor down there, Redchin," floated back the half-mocking voice.

Hume came last, and found that Namki had now struck into an actual trail, no doubt made by sheep or other animals. It was faint, but it served as guide and was at least practicable to follow, though there were some hair-raising spots. At one of these, where the cloud-mist curled so densely around as to shut off his companions from sight, Hume caught a quick yell of warning and braced himself just in time to receive the shock. An instant later the line slackened and he heard Patrick cursing in relief.

"All right, master!" came Namki's voice. "Redchin was so eager to reach the gold and fair women and liquor that he tried to fly like a bird. Ready!"

Patrick growled in response. Hume was forced to admire the perfect sang-froid of the Kalmuck, who contrived to anger Patrick at the moment when he must have been unnerved by his close escape. As he was thus thinking, he looked out and down—and a sudden rift in the cloud showed him a line of vivid green far below, merging into the gold of unreaped harvest fields. Then it was gone again as the cloud closed in.

On down the three men climbed, that glimpse of the vast gulf below abiding with them as a threatening memory; it seemed that they would never get clear of the foggy mist which surrounded them, so that despite the trail each step was a hazard. Once Hume went off, indeed, as a stone turned under his foot; he slid only a few feet and checked himself, then regained the trail with lacerated hands and bleeding knees, but safe.

Then suddenly the cloud was gone, lifted by a puff of wind. Hume looked again for that green valley, but it had vanished; the three men were on a long knob or shoulder of the mountain, and Namki threw off the line with the cheerful word that it was no longer needed. Now he set forward at a good pace, and they struck into a rift which widened into a gorge, and this in turn became a small branch valley which led them into the main one.

The sun was gone from sight, though there was still a long daylight left, when at last the scene broadened before them. They came suddenly upon a group of horses, that eyed them in obvious surprize and moved slowly off; the green valley opened, and a short quarter-mile distant appeared grain, over-ripe and frost-touched, a long yellow field of it. And, beyond the grain, a house of logs, with trees around it. Namki halted, and indicated the house.

"That is where the god and ruler of these folk live," he said, and wrinkled up his swarthy features in perplexity. "But I don't understand this silence and desolation!"

"Looks queer," said Patrick. "Fields unreaped, horses apparently wild, not a sign of smoke! And nobody in sight. Let's go slow."

Hume laughed quietly.

"You chaps wait here," he said. "Namki, see if you can catch any of those horses. I'll go ahead and see what there is to see."

"Be careful, lest you find death," said Namki, frowning.

Hume did not heed the words. He slipped off his pack, took his rifle in hand and strode forward, unimpressed by Patrick's fear of a trap and Namki's perplexity. Though no smoke rose from the house, as he came closer to it he had a distinct idea that it was occupied; it lacked entirely that vague suggestion of desolation that is invariably conveyed by an empty abode. Yet it evinced no overt token of life, nor as he glanced up and down the widening valley, where other houses were visible, could Hume detect any living creature. Certainly there was no sign of danger.

Coming to the trees, he observed that on the other side of them was a large creek which ran down the valley. The house drew his attention now, as he approached the doorway. The windows were of scraped skin or paper, oiled; there was no ornamentation; the neat work of the builders was evident at the corners where the logs were mortised and fitted. Clay or moss filled the chinks, and before the doorway had been a garden, which was now withered and dead.

Hume stood before the entrance, undecided whether to call out or not; and as he stood there, the door swung open and a woman appeared, staring at him with widening eyes. But, if she were astonished, Hume was held speechless, incredulous, even a little awed.

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She was tall, gowned from throat to ankles in a loose robe of coarse white linen which was embroidered in red and gold, and her face was framed in a great mass of pale golden hair which came down in two plaits across her breast. What a face it was! To Hume, it was a sudden vision of unearthly glory, that pale, noble and unutterably beautiful face, whose first astonishment was now succeeded by calm acceptance of his presence; the eyes were blue, not a hard and glittering blue like those of Patrick, but infinitely tender and gentle, filled at once with a supreme knowledge and a supreme innocence. Hume's first coherent thought was one of pity, that this superb creature, a very Athena, should be no more than an ignorant peasant of the steppes, bound to the wheel of a relentless fate. Then he realized that she was speaking, and with a shock recognized her words as flawless French.

"You are a white man, a stranger—but not a Russian! You have come in peace?"

Hume assented with a gesture, for he could find no words. A look of sadness came across her face. She held out a hand that was brown and firm, yet exquisitely formed.

"Heaven has sent you in answer to my prayers—but too late! They are all dead. I am the only one left. I buried my grandfather this morning. Come in and rest."

IV

HUME forgot his companions, forgot everything but this woman who had welcomed him. He left his rifle outside the door and followed her into a large, rather bare, room where a copper samovar steaming on a table was the only ornament. The woman motioned him to a chair formed of unbarked birch, staring at him as he bared his head. He saw that two tears had started upon her cheeks, though her voice remained low and firm and deep as she spoke again.

"Heaven sent you too late. Poor Feodor Musvitch! He died yesterday, poor grandfather. It all came from the wounded Russian officer who rode around the lake and was given shelter last month. He had the sickness. Feodor said that it was the plague, and we could not stop it. All are dead, all!"

Hume was actually trembling, though not from fear of the plague.

"Your—your name?" he asked hoarsely. "Did you say Musvitch?"

Her broad brows lifted a trifle.

"Yes. I am Marie, his granddaughter."

Hume forced himself to coherence, to prosaic thought.

"I regret to say that Heaven did not send us," he said quietly, "although it may be that we can be of assistance to you. I am an American, David Hume by name; with me are two friends. May I bring them? We were seeking this valley and came over the hills."

The shadow of a smile touched the lips of Marie.

"Does it not seem that I was right, and that you were sent here in answer to my prayers?" she returned. "Yes, bring your friends. Are you afraid of the plague?"

Hume made a gesture of unconcern and left the room. Outside he paused, drew a deep breath, waved his arm to the figures of Namki and Patrick, who had approached. Feodor Musvitch! Was it possible, or was this some mad dream after all?

"Well?" called Patrick, hurrying up.

"All gone with the plague, except one girl," said Hume. "If you're afraid, stay here."

Patrick stared at him, open-mouthed.

"You don't mean that——"

"Man," broke out Hume earnestly, "you don't know—you can't realize! Make Namki stay outside and camp in that shed under the trees. He must not hear her story. All these Tatars know the name, though I don't think the girl herself is aware of what it means——"

"Have you gone off your head, or what?" demanded Patrick.

Hume laughed suddenly.

"Come along and see."

Patrick turned to Namki, who was only too glad to stay out of that house on hearing how the plague had been there before him. Then, hesitating only a moment, Patrick came on to the doorway and followed Hume inside. Marie was drawing tea from the samovar, and as she turned to them, Hume spoke in French and introduced Patrick. She smiled and held out her hand to him in welcome.

At hearing her name, Patrick started, but controlled himself and returned her greeting in broken French. Neither he nor Hume could speak Russian.

"If you will excuse me a moment," said

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the girl, "I will get candles. Darkness comes soon."

She went to another doorway, which opened upon a second room. Hume had a glimpse of book-shelves and a large ikon—then Patrick had gripped his arm, chuckling.

"I'll confess the name gave me a jump, Dave, but you're foolish!"

Hume looked steadily at his friend.

"Her grandfather died yesterday. His name was Feodor Musvitch."

Patrick's hand fell away. He took a step backward, his eyes widening on Hume. The latter made a gesture of caution.

"Not now. Later! We have stumbled on the clue to a tremendous mystery—or else it is a tremendous coincidence. Think it over. The colony settled here for many years; the old man's name; this woman who speaks French—woman? She's not over twenty, I'll swear! Then the very face of her, the look in her eyes! Can you doubt?"

Patrick looked up at Marie as she entered, stared at her as at a vision. She brought two brass candlesticks and set candles in them, then uncovered a small oil-lamp near the hearth, in which a perpetual wick was burning. Seeing her intent, Hume checked her and got out his match-box; she laughed and clapped her hands delightedly as he struck a match and lighted the candles. Here was a new thing to her.

The three drew stools to the table. The meal was simple—tea and bread and some dried fish. Marie explained, a hurt in her eyes at the thought, how there had been no one to milk the cows, and the poor brutes had vanished, had run away in agony doubtless. She told them of the Russian officer who had wandered into the valley and who had been allowed to remain out of pity; Hume gathered that the colony had maintained guards about the lake. This feeling of pity for the wounded man had destroyed the entire colony, a thing which Marie could not understand in her conception of divine justice. Hume had a cynical comment on his lips, but something checked it—reverence, perhaps. He felt abashed before the singularly unblemished mind of this girl, which was betrayed in every word she spoke.

She told them of the colony, which had dwindled of recent years. Her father, who was now some years dead, and her grandfather had each been the *Merin* or governor of the colony, composed of peasants and a few nobles from Siberia, refugees in the old days of the czars. They maintained little communication with the outside world, content to be forgotten. Hume gathered that their principles had been very much those of the idealist Tolstoi.

Suddenly the girl rose and regarded them with a grave air.

"I am going to pray beside Feodor's grave, for it is evening," she said, and left the house.

The two men remained looking at each other, disturbed and uneasy. Patrick was very nervous. Presently Hume filled his pipe and lighted it at the candle.

"Think what she must have been through!" he observed meditatively. "How many of them did she bury, I wonder? We'll have to take her out of here, Jim. Do you know, I'm half-convinced that she was right—that we were sent here in answer to her prayers——"

Chin on breast, he stared down at the table. Patrick darted him a glance of surprize.

"Eh? I thought you didn't take much stock in religion, Dave."

Hume lifted grave eyes.

"I'm humble tonight, Pat. It's not—the other thing. It's the woman herself, and her sublime faith." He drew a deep breath. "Well, time enough! You see why I didn't want Namki in here? He must never hear the name of her grandfather. When he was here before, it's evident that he did not hear it; doubtless the old man was known and spoken of in Russian style, simply as Feodor."

Patrick nodded, frowningly.

"You're right, of course. But I've always heard that Feodor Musvitch died in Tomsk. That's the current story. They know all about it here in Mongolia, because the two last czars were keenly interested in the Musvitch yarn and went to great lengths to investigate it. Also, because there was a good deal of correspondence between the Living Buddha and Alexander himself—he was interested in the Mongolian wizardy, you know. But, man, it's incredible! It's impossible!"

Hume took the pipe from his mouth and emitted a thin cloud of smoke.

"Pat, I am rapidly losing my skepticism. The house where Feodor lived in Tomsk is even now preserved as a place of pilgrimage,

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his grave is pointed out, his fate is known. But consider! The Romanoffs were vitally concerned in putting an end to him once and for all. There's practically no doubt whatever in either Russia or Mongolia that Feodor Musvitch was the Czar Alexander, who spent his last days roaming about under that assumed name, doing all the good in the world that he could find to do. That story, I believe, is the truth."

"But, Dave!" protested Patrick. "You can't believe that the old grandfather she buried——"

"Of course not," said Hume, and smiled. "Yet, my dear chap, see how logically it all works out! This grandfather was perhaps the son of the original Feodor, perhaps did not know that he was a Romanoff, but undoubtedly knew that the police were after him. How can we tell? He may have been immured in Siberia, for the Romanoffs did their ——est to hush up the whole Musvitch affair. We find him here at the head of a colony of *émigrés*, living the simple life. We find the name Feodor Musvitch preserved. We find this girl speaking the pure French of Russia, evidently very highly educated and cultured; there are shelves of books in the adjoining room. In short, Pat, I believe that we have found a far more wonderful thing than your Black Stone we came to seek."

Patrick was strained and tense.

"But do you realize, Dave—if this thing is true, that girl is the—that we have found the last of the Romanoffs?"

Hume laughed.

"Nonsense, man! No such thing. There are dozens of Romanoffs. But I do realize that we have to keep this to ourselves. I'd not tell even Marie herself. Not a whisper of it must get out! Do you agree?"

"Done," said Patrick promptly. "Going to stay here tonight?"

"No. We'll camp outside with Namki."

Patrick lifted his bushy, grizzled brows.

"Afraid of the plague?"

Hume only shook his head in silence. At this moment Marie reentered the room, and Hume hastened to refill the heavy china cups with tea. She nodded gratefully, resumed her seat, and began at once to talk about her vanished friends and neighbors. From this Hume soon switched her mind, telling frankly of their own mission here.

He learned that they were five miles from the lower end of the valley, where the Black Stone mass was located. She knew it well, as it formed the boundary beyond which no member of the colony, save certain guards, could stray; and she confirmed Namki's account of its peculiar properties.

"You have come here just to get a piece of that stone? Singular!" She smiled gravely. "The Mongol people have strange beliefs, however. I remember years ago, when I was a little girl, a Kalmuck Tatar came here, a wandering hunter, perishing from starvation and cold. He read my fortune on the shoulder-blade of a sheep; I remember that he said he would meet me again and would bring me great joy and good-fortune in a day when around me was only sorrow and misfortune. Feodor used to laugh over it—why, what is the matter?"

The two men exchanged an odd look.

"That man is our companion outside, the same who guided us here," said Patrick.

Marie stared at them, and was about to speak eagerly when Hume intervened.

"When you see him, say no word about your grandfather's name. Do not mention your own name of Musvitch, or it may make trouble. Now, Marie, what are your plans? You can not stay here alone. We can not remain here, for the mountain-passes will soon be filled with snow, and we must depart swiftly. Besides, there is danger ahead of us. Do you wish to leave with us?"

"Why, of course!" she said simply, as if she had expected nothing else. "Were you not sent in answer to my prayers?"

Hume met her grave, intent gaze, and a slow flush rose in his cheek.

"I believe that we were," he acknowledged, and rose. "Good night, *mademoiselle*. We shall join our Kalmuck friend. Until morning!"

She extended her hand to him, and for a moment he looked into her eyes, then turned to the door and left abruptly. When Patrick joined him outside, he was striding up and down beneath the stars. The older man came up and took his arm.

"Dave, it looks as though you'd come to believe in a watchful providence, after all! Well, I'll go you one better."

"Eh?" Hume glanced at the dark figure of Patrick. "How's that?"

"I've come to believe in angels. There's Namki's fire. Come on."

They walked in silence toward the glimmer of firelight. The Kalmuck had refused

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to enter the low shed behind the house but had camped among the trees. As they joined him, he eyed them keenly, wrinkling up his brown dog's nose.

"Did I not say that we would find death in this place?" he spoke out.

Hume halted.

"Pat, we may be infected from that house; for Namki's sake——"

Namki laughed harshly, understanding the purport of the remark if not the actual words.

"Fear not, master! The number of my days does not end here, nor does my fate come by sickness. At the same time," he added shrewdly, "I am taking no chances. And did you see the little girl who was my friend when I was here before?"

"She remembered you," said Hume shortly.

Namki grinned.

"Of course she did. And what did I tell you—fair women and gold and battle! Master, now you look as though you had waked up; now you look as you did in Kalgan when we started on this expedition! Did not Namki say that he would bring you luck?"

Hume gazed fixedly at the little man for a moment; then, with a gesture that might have meant anything, he picked up his blanket and walked apart. Patrick looked at Namki, and between the two men passed a silent laugh.

V

PATRICK scanned the landscape carefully through the glasses, then turned as Hume came back from his morning dip in the creek. The sun was just topping the eastern mountain-rim.

"Dave, what's the program?" he asked. "I pass the responsibility to you, old chap."

"Time is essential, isn't it?" Hume accepted without comment. "Looks to me as though we had a slim chance to get your slate and beat it before Kaigor Beyli and his Chinese can get on the scene. At least, it's possible."

"I doubt it," said Patrick.

Namki, squatted over the fire, grinned at that.

"Suppose you and Namki round up some horses, leave a few here, and go on down the valley. I'll wait, get Marie packed up, and join you tonight. See any one?"

"Not a soul. Plenty of horses, a few sheep, and a scattering of cattle. We'll not starve. We may have to do some work on that stone, remember, so don't count on too quick a start for home. Hullo! I don't wonder you shaved so carefully. What a raving beauty she is, lad!"

Marie was approaching them from the house; the fresh, roseate light of sunrise struck upon her white-gowned, golden-crowned figure with a singular radiance, so that she seemed rather some creature from another world than the daughter of a peasant's plague-stricken house. Namki rose and stood staring, an unwonted awe and veneration in his gaze, and she came to him with a smile and held out her hand in greeting.

"Do you remember me, hunter and wizard?"

He did not understand her speech, knowing neither Russian nor French, but he touched her fingers and then prostrated himself before her. She stooped and caught his hand, pulling him up, and over his head smiled at Hume and Patrick.

"Come! Tell him to have no fear. Breakfast is ready for you all, and I do not think the sickness will touch you."

Patrick spoke to the Kalmuck, who did not refuse the invitation, while Hume walked to the house with the girl, telling her as they went of the program he had set forth. She assented briefly and without comment, rather to his surprize.

The three men sat at table with her, enjoying a luxury of linen and civilized tableware unknown to them for some time. During the meal she directed Patrick where to find some very good horses, at a bit of grazing-ground half a mile distant, and informed him that there was no lack of bridles and riding-gear in the shed.

As to the mass of Black Stone down the valley, that was another matter and one which would require tools and labor. The girl informed Patrick where to find a building used as a community storehouse for implements, tools and grain, and then turned to Hume.

"Feodor kept a large quantity of gold for possible trading with the outer world, where it is very highly esteemed," she said quaintly. "I think there must be two good horse-loads. Do you want to bother with it or not?"

Hume's brows went up. His decision was made instantly, for the girl's sake.

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"Certainly," he said. "You will need it, once you get out of this place. I can assure you that it is a powerful servant."

"Then—" and she glanced at Patrick—"bring extra horses to carry it."

"Four pack-animals, then," said Patrick, and rose with a cluck to the Kalmuck. "Two for the gold, two for your effects and for our own stuff. Good! You get that dust well-sacked, Dave. It's a job."

Patrick and Namki left the house at once. Hume went to the doorway, lighted his pipe, and gazed reflectively after his two companions; they were talking together with an eager air, Patrick speaking hastily, Namki laughing. The Kalmuck's refrain came again into Hume's mind—gold and fair women and liquor! That was it. Patrick was off in search of liquor. The thought disquieted Hume.

At a touch, he turned to find Marie at his elbow, her thoughtful eyes upon his face.

"What is the matter? You are angry about something?"

He laughed.

"Not at all! I was merely thinking things over. If you will show me where that gold is kept, I'll put it in shape for the journey while you pack up your things."

"What things shall I take?" she inquired.

"Nothing more than you must. You have some trinkets, clothes, personal things that are dear to you? Get them together and I'll make up a pack. Remember, space is valuable and weight may hinder us. And, if I were you, I'd change into men's clothes; you are too beautiful to go across Mongolia as you are. A fur-coat over all, if you have one; if you have any extra ones, we can use them ourselves, for ours were left behind.

She nodded.

"Very well. Come and I'll show you the gold. From time to time the men took it out of the creek and brought it to Feodor to keep."

Stepping outside, Marie led him to the corner of the house. Against the logs was a huge coffer, solidly built of adzed beams, the top set on leather hinges. The girl threw back this top, showing the coffer partly filled with small hide sacks.

"There are all kinds of saddle-bags in the shed," she informed him. "Take whatever you wish, of course. I'll call you when my things are ready."

She departed into the house. Hume stared for a moment at the piles of sacked gold-dust, then turned and made his way to the shed, a whimsical smile on his lips. Of what little worth this gold seemed, here and now! Yet, planning for the future as he was, he knew only too well what it would mean to Marie Musvitch once she was away from this hidden valley.

Nearing the shed, he paused to search for Namki and Patrick, but they were out of sight. He entered the dark little shack, and found it crammed with all manner of things. To his right were piles of horse-gear and harness, from which he threw saddles and bridles outside the door, then selected four pairs of saddle-bags from a heap of various styles. Those which he picked, in no little wonder, were of old Chinese weave, backed and reinforced with leather. He tossed them outside and then followed, staring down at them with a touch of his old cynicism.

"Evidently, art went begging in this place," he reflected. "Even if we lose the gold, we can get a couple of hundred apiece for these in Pekin—provided we get there alive! I wonder if that girl-woman was right? Surely it was not by mere chance that the idle tale of a chattering Kalmuck brought us into her life at this exact moment?"

He stared frowningly down at the heap of selected stuff, his first cynical thought banished in an uneasy meditation upon the whole train of circumstances which had brought the three of them to this valley. Of what tremendous import had first seemed their quest for the sacred Black Stone, and now how trivial it was in comparison with the greater thing that had come to them! Or did the other two think so? Perhaps he was alone in this——

A shout roused him, wakened him from his abstracted dream. He swung about to see a dozen horses being urged forward, Patrick and Namki riding two of the beasts. They were brought up and halted, and while Namki brought out hobbles from the shed and selected six to leave behind, Patrick exultantly set forth a new project.

"This Kalmuck is a wizard with horses, as well as with fortune-telling, Dave! He can actually whistle in the brutes like dogs. We'll gather up all the loose horses we meet on the way down the valley, and take 'em along. They'll be no bother."

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Hume nodded.

"To sell later on?"

"Perhaps, for the girl's benefit. And I've a possible use for them in my head. Wait and see. Well, until tonight! So long."

He dragged a saddle from the shed, and Hume helped him get his own beast in shape, then he swung up and was off with Namki and four loose horses, riding down the valley at a gallop. Hume got the two best of the remaining six animals saddled and bridled, then fitted the magnificent Chinese pack-bags to the other four. These he bridled, hitching the reins together, and then drove the four horses over to the house.

These things took time, and loading the heavy little sacks of gold was no light work. He got it done at last, and found that as Marie had predicted, there were nearly two full loads of the yellow dust. When he had balanced all four bags and had strapped them tight, he lighted his pipe and sat down to rest, his eyes wandering along the green reaches of the valley. Although the day was clear, gathering clouds in the north and west predicted storm.

A slight sound drew his attention, and he rose, staring at the smiling figure of Marie as she stood awaiting his verdict. Now she was changed indeed, altered almost beyond recognition, for she wore the great boots and blouse and baggy trousers of a peasant, and her golden hair was lost away under a huge astrakan hat. About her shoulders was flung a coat of unrivaled sables, which came to her feet.

"Does it suit?" she asked, smiling at his astounded face, and then let the coat slide to the ground. "I am afraid," she added naively, "that I can not pass for a man, but at a distance it may do."

"Excellent, excellent!" said Hume. "But surely, you're not already packed?"

"I have everything picked out that I wish to take," she replied. "Come and see. And I have a very pretty coat for you to wear, too! I hope you'll like it."

Hume followed her into the house. In the center of the large room was a heap of miscellaneous objects; a few books, some clothes, trinkets, topped by an old-fashioned Snider and a bandolier of cartridges. All in all, not enough for a horse-load. Marie held up a coat, however, that made Hume catch his breath, for it was all of the finest ermine—a coat worth a fortune in Pekin or Urga. With it were mittens to match.

"Is it not pretty?" she asked, smiling. "I'm glad you like it. Our people got many of these white skins in the Winter. Now, it's getting on toward noon, so I'll get luncheon while you pack up my things. Have I got too much?"

"Add more if you wish," said Hume. "And thank you for the coat. I do like it, though it is far too handsome for me."

"I don't think so," she said simply, and turned to the samovar.

Hume got her things into a pack, trying not to look too closely at them; he felt confused, bewildered, felt a little hurt at the way he was forcing her to leave her home and everything she had known. When he was strapping the pack he paused and looked up at the girl, and responded to her inquiring glance.

"I was thinking—aren't you sorry to leave all this, to go away from this peaceful valley? You seem so cheerful this morning, Marie——"

He broke off, conscious of how awkwardly he was expressing his thought.

"Of course," she said, and for a moment he thought that tears were close to the surface. "Of course—and yet I'm glad, too. And I know how necessary it is. Grandfather talked to me when he was dying; he told me to pray to God for a protector, and he said that God had never failed to answer his prayers, and would not fail to answer mine. Well, that is true, as you have seen. And Feodor told me of the terrible things outside this valley, the killing and the evil that is done, and how some day men would come here to lay waste and rob and destroy. So, you see, it is better for me to go away now, with you and your friends."

"I am glad that you trust us," said Hume, a trifle huskily, and lowered his head. —

"If you were not to be trusted, God would not have sent you here," her voice reached him. He could find no answer to that.

So, after a little, they sat together at the table, and then Marie went to spend a last moment at the grave of her grandfather, while Hume loaded her effects and those of his own party on the two spare pack-horses. Presently she rejoined him, and stood for a moment looking back at the log-house

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which had been home to her—then she was in the saddle beside him and for all her brave words, tears were on her cheeks.

They rode down the valley slowly.

VI

RIDING down the valley together, Hume learned from Marie many details regarding the wiped-out colony of Russians. How only certain ones were allowed to go to the lake for fish; how the community life was lived, the traits of this or that man. Yet he scarcely listened. He was wondering whether his conjectures were true—whether this girl beside him were not of the bluest Romanoff blood!

Then, after a little, he forced down this thought, put it entirely away from him, and resolved never to dwell upon it again. That way lay danger, and no good. The thing must be absolutely forgotten. So resolving, Hume kept the determination in future. The surprize was past; and though he never afterward doubted the fact, he never sought confirmation of it.

"There is a good deal of oil at the farther end of the lake." Her words suddenly struck his brain awake. "Two or three times each year the men would go there and put out the fires and gather oil, then light the fires again. The Buriats thought demons lived there. Tell me, why should all these people of mine be destroyed because they gave shelter to a poor wounded man? They were good people. There was not a bad person among us."

Hume hesitated before her questioning eyes.

"Perhaps," he responded slowly, "perhaps it was necessary, in order that you might go out into the world——"

"But I am no better than they were!" she protested swiftly.

"I think you are, Marie. Sometimes I think that God is brutally scientific, permitting multitudes to be eliminated in order that one superior person should remain and——"

"As your friends and expedition were destroyed, that you might remain?"

This struck Hume like a blow.

"No!" he cried. "No! I was not thinking of that. There were better men than I——"

"Forgive me," she said gently. "But why think such things? It is much simpler just to have faith. Look! There is where Vassili the Lame lived. He made wine from those grapes."

Hume was afraid of her terrible simplicity, and drew a breath of relief over the change of subject.

To their left was a little knoll, with blackened twists of vines along the slope and a log-house among these. So, as they rode along the widening creek, Marie pointed out where this one and that one lived, and presently they passed a grove of trees where were a host of wooden crosses, some old, some new. Here under the ground lay most of these people, all save the last few who had had no strength left to finish the work. Like a consuming fire, the plague had swept them away.

The lower end of the valley narrowed, with the bleak mountains jutting up all around, into a rocky gorge through which the creek tumbled turbulently toward the lake beyond. Here there was a rude mill, and near it a large barn-like store-house where such agricultural implements as the colonists possessed were kept, together with their grain and other communal products.

Upon approaching this point, Hume perceived that his companions had not been idle, for near the mill was grazing a great herd of horses, between forty and fifty in number. He could see nothing of the two men, however, until suddenly the voice of Patrick startled him, for it seemed to come from almost beside him.

"Gently, Namki, gently! That is perfect, exactly as we want——"

Hume drew rein, amazed, for the speaker remained invisible. Then Marie laughed softly and solved the problem, as she pointed toward the gorge.

"They are there, near the Black Stone you spoke about! There is a turn in the gorge where that mass of stone rests, and it echoes a person's voice tremendously. I remember when that poor Russian officer was sighted by the guards, we could hear the shouts of warning away up where we lived."

In effect, the mass of decomposed slate served as a sounding-board, the throat of the gorge as an amplifier; while the ordinary tone of a person standing under the sounding-board might be heard for several hundred yards, a shout would be hurled out for miles across the valley. As Hume and Marie rode closer, the sound of Patrick's

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voice grew more sharp, until suddenly the focus was lost and the horses started violently; a thunderous roar of sound was rising and booming all around them, and only with difficulty did Hume realize that Namki was laughing.

Presently they drew in upon the two men, while the throat of the gorge re-echoed every sound, even the thud of hoofs sending vast reverberations whirling overhead. Namki and Patrick were standing at the foot of a high, curved mass of slate which was badly decomposed and split. The noise of the stream, intensified and re-echoed, filled the air and drowned out everything.

Patrick waved his hand to Hume, while the Kalmuck squatted and stuffed his little pipe. Then, with startling abruptness, all the volume of sound leaped into silence and was gone, and Hume heard Patrick addressing him exultantly.

"—like this natural speaking-trumpet, eh? No wonder the Buriats say that demons live here! Well, come and have a look at the sacred stone. We got a pick from the store-house and got out a slab without any trouble. My word, where did you get that fur-coat!"

Hume smiled.

"A present from Marie; I have another coat for each of you, and we'll need 'em tonight. Storm coming down."

He swung from the saddle, gave Marie his hand, and helped her to the ground. Namki fastened his glittering eyes upon the fur-coats, which were lashed to the pack-horses, and grinned happily. Patrick sent him down to the creek for water, and he hastened away.

"So this is your stone, is it? Does it answer specifications?" Hume stood looking at the slab which Patrick had pried loose.

"Absolutely, as regards size. We haven't tried out the magic yet, but you can see the lichen growth for yourself."

Hume nodded, and bent closer. The slab, several inches thick, was three feet long by two wide, and presented a flat slate surface upon which was plainly visible a white tracery of lines which in fact did bear remarkable resemblance to the curved and sharp-angled ancient Tibetan script. So delicate and fine was the fungus growth, that only by careful examination could Hume be certain of its character.

"Looks like a pretty good guess all around," he said. "This weighs something; how can we carry the thing?"

"Horses are cheap," and Patrick chuckled. "But we'll have to make sure of our game—now take a look at it!"

Namki returned with a little water, which he wiped across the face of the stone. This instantly became black slate, apparently without a mark upon it. They stood watching while the water dried away, and the curious markings again became visible.

"In the hands of cunning lamas, this thing can effect wonders," said Hume, thoughtfully. "Well, pack it up and let's move on! You're not going to take that herd of horses?"

"Just you watch us." Patrick laughed up at him. "Namki can handle them. Ride on slowly, and we'll be right along with our loot."

The two men mounted their horses, that had been greazing near by, and whirled back to the valley at a gallop. Hume lashed their rifles to the pack-saddles, and mounted. Marie was already in the saddle, being an expert rider.

They rode slowly down the gorge, which presently widened into another valley where the lake lay outspread before them. This famed Dzu Nor was not large—half a mile wide and two miles long. A line of trees marked an outlet creek which ran off to the southeast and the steppes. This outer valley, in fact, was only a niche in the hills, and opened out almost directly on the broad steppes, the mountains running off to east and west.

Hume, seeking for the sacred mountain, found it to the southwest; there was no mistaking that flat-topped hill, not very high, which stood isolated and grim. Hume figured it twelve or fifteen miles away. It was bare and bleak like the other hills, with no mark to distinguish it save the flat crest.

"We had better ride on and get past the lake," said Marie. "The road runs there to the left. It is narrow, and will be crowded when the horses come up."

Hume nodded and moved forward, sniffing the oily smear of smoke on the air. This came from the lake below, the trail proceeding along the very brink of overhanging cliffs which shut out the water from sight; along the break of this rocky scarp, below, was the oil-seepage, and the smoke of the burning petroleum drifted up along the cliffs and rose reeking in the air.

As they rode on, the glory of sunlight was

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already fading and waning. Hume glanced up to see that the boding clouds from the north had covered half the heavens, and the sun was gone behind a thin haze. The girl caught his glance.

"Storm tonight or tomorrow," she commented. "Rain is rare at this season, but it may come. Perhaps it will snow."

"We'll catch the cold wind tonight," said Hume. "When we reach the end of the lake, by that patch of larch, we'll make camp and have an early dinner. We must be off before dark."

"And travel at night?" she asked, with a quick lift of brows.

"Yes. Somewhere outside here men are waiting to catch us. We must go to that mountain yonder," and he pointed. "If we can get there before daylight, I can finish the job tomorrow. I'm afraid that a trap may be set between here and the mountain, so by getting over the ground tonight we'll eliminate one point of danger."

He went on to tell her in more detail about Kaigor Beyli and the strange quest to be followed on the sacred mountain, having previously sketched it in rough outline only. If the girl thought it singular that he himself was ignorant of what he sought on that mountain, she made no comment.

Presently they gained the lower end of the lake and dismounted. Hume let the horses graze while he started a fire; he had no fear that the smoke would betray their position, since the burning oil-seepage at the head of the lake made an eternal smudge. Owing to the rapidity with which he and his companions had moved, and the scant time which had elapsed since Patrick was in Urga, Hume had great hope of getting far away from the spot before Kaigor Beyli could arrive, and of evading that gentleman altogether

It was not long before Patrick came in advance of the herd, which Namki was driving. He galloped up to the fire and dismounted, bringing the butchered carcass of a sheep.

"Fresh meat and no lack of dried fish, not to mention wine," he exclaimed. "We loaded up a few of the horses, Dave."

"So I thought," said Hume dryly, and outlined his plans for an immediate advance.

Patrick assented, and gave the sacred mountain a long scrutiny through the glasses, but discovered nothing.

"Looks like any other hill to me," he said. "Fifteen miles away at the outside. We'll need that wine tonight, Dave—it's going to be cold!"

Namki came up with the cavalcade. Hume saw that a litter of poles had been slung from one horse to another, the black stone being securely wrapped in hides and lashed to this litter. The animals were tame and were controlled with ease by the Kalmuck, now in his element. Some of the horses bore loads, and Namki set to work stringing all the pack-animals together. He approved an immediate march, stating that he could guide them to the best spot for an ascent of the mountain.

"But how can you climb it?" asked Marie, while they dined. "If it is as you say, then no horse can live——"

"Stilts," said Hume, and explained the word to her. "I'm fairly tall. Three-foot stilts will set me as high as any descendant of Jenghis Khan. Eh, Pat?"

"Approved, my lord," said Patrick, and lifted his pannikin of wine. "To the health of Marie, and a safe ride tonight. *Skoal!*"

Hume joined in the toast, though with some misgivings. He was not so sure about that mountain.

VII

SUNRISE filled the little valley, flooded it with light. A path ran straight upward, straight to the mountain's bald top; every rock and boulder was distinct and clear-cut in the brilliant light of morning. A startled rabbit darted up the path, came to an abrupt halt, quivering; then leaped bolt upright into the air and fell dead.

"That's the spot, Namki," said Hume quietly. "Come and help me."

He sat down and began lashing the rudely-hewn stilts to his legs.

Below them, half a mile distant, were the camp and the horses; Hume saw the figures of Marie and Patrick standing there, staring upward, watching. The morning was clear and sunny, yet a bitter wind was sweeping down from the northern mountains. Hume discarded his ermine coat as he sat. The mittens, however, he retained.

"Redchin is a wise man," observed the Kalmuck, while he made the stilts fast. "It was well that he brought those traps from the store house in the valley of the Russians! If we had not caught those rabbits, we would not have known where the zone of death began."

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"We do not know now how high it is," said Hume grimly.

"The descendants of Jenghis Khan pass it safely," returned Namki. "He who lives on the top is an old man, or so I have heard, and the demon guards him. You will be safe, for I have sacrificed to the demon. Show him the ring, remember, take what he gives you, and waste no more time than needs be, master. There, you are ready! Now stand up, and look where I point."

Hume held out his hand, on which glimmered the yellow jade ring that Patrick had fetched from Urga. Namki aided him to rise, and having practised with the stilts before leaving camp, he balanced himself easily. The Kalmuck extended his arm, pointing off to the southern plain.

"Look there, master! Do you see an object like a patch of white ground, near the horizon?"

"I see it," said Hume. "What is it?"

"The city where Jenghis Khan and his sons feasted; ancient temples, monasteries, palaces—white ruins, Karakorum the magnificent! Khans and emperors lie buried there, master; and the object that this old man up above will give you is something that he took from one of those tombs. What is it I know not; some say one thing, some say another, but it is something that the Living Buddha would like to have. Go, and luck go with you!"

Now Namki set free the second of his two rabbits, and the leaping creature fell dead beside the first. The danger-zone was clearly defined.

Hume started, aiding his balance by means of a long pole that the Kalmuck handed him. With this, the feat was no trick at all. Yet he could not repress a shiver, a thrill of fear and wonder and wild surmise, as he came to the two dead rabbits. Another step—and nothing happened. He was past the line of demarcation between life and death. The legend was true; somewhere about the level of his waist, invisible but terrible, hovered instant death. What would happen if one of his supports gave way?

Singularly enough, Hume found himself assailed by an overwhelming impulse to lower his head and sniff the air below. That this clear, cold atmosphere, with the wind whistling high overhead, could bear invisible doom, seemed preposterous and incredible. He actually caught himself bending forward, and jerked erect with swift horror at this mental trick. Now he hobbled ahead, following the path that led him upward, bending every energy to getting over the ground as rapidly as was consistent with safety.

As he went, Hume cursed the Living Buddha and Patrick's wild enterprise in no measured terms. It became more and more evident that a hard bargain had been driven with Patrick in Urga; that Patrick, carried away by his vision of high emprise and achievement, had promised any and everything demanded. A reckoning must be had in Urga, or else in Zain, which was only a score of miles to the south; having an independent dominion, subject only to the Living Buddha in Urga, the local Hutuktu of Zain was a great and important "god."

More than once Hume discerned skeletons and bones, both of animals and men, strewing the cañon-floor below; thus it appeared that the deadly gas had no fixed limit, and fluctuated up and down the mountainside, for otherwise these bones would have been all in one place.

At length, after some twenty minutes of the climb, the flat top of the hill opened out and Hume drew a quick breath of relief. The wind struck down more sweepingly here, and under its icy touch Hume knew that he must be past the danger-zone. He stooped by aid of his pole, and with stiff fingers unfastened the stilts. As they fell away, he leaped to the ground, half-afraid—but nothing happened. A laugh came from him, and he looked ahead to where a low hut of stones was visible. Nothing else broke the bare expense of hill-crest, except the fantastic shapes of eroded boulders and rock-forms, carved by wind and rain.

Striding briskly forward, invigorated and heartened by this speedy and successful issue of the enterprise, Hume came to the entrance of the hut. To his surprize, the door not only stood ajar but proved to be a rotten and moldered shell of ancient timbers. Hume caught his breath, and stood staring at the horrible figure facing him.

Three stone slabs in the shape of a dolmen formed a table, at which, placed in a chair likewise of stone, was the gigantic shape of a man—undoubtedly one of the famed progeny of Jenghis. The man was dead; at a glance, Hume saw that he had been sitting here for scores of years, perhaps for centuries, and had been mummified

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—perhaps artificially, perhaps by the natural action of Winter frosts or the dry, cold winds of Summer. His grinning mask of a face was turned to the entrance, and in the eye-sockets had been set glittering triangles of bright green jade. As the body was in a horribly lifelike attitude, leaning forward upon the table with elbows and hands, the first glimpse of it was startling in the extreme. No wonder legend said a demon sat on this hilltop!

Hume paused, eying the tatters of fur and hide that clothed the mummy, and his very practical mind at once drew swift conclusions.

"Hm! Now I begin to see light. Here's the old gentleman, who has something that the Living Buddha wants very much to get and can't, because none of those Mongol giants would have the nerve to step inside this shack after a look at those green eyes. No wonder legends cluster around here like flies! Probably the sons of Jenghis come as far as the hilltop to prove their birth, and then get back down in a hurry; that would explain the path, at least. But what is it that this old chap is hanging on to?"

He stepped forward across the threshold, since there was nothing else in the hut, and looked more closely at the table of stone, upon which the mummy's hands rested.

Then he saw that those hands were clenched upon an object, the brown talons fastened over it firmly. This object was a seal of black-mottled green jade, seven inches in length, each side two inches square; each of the four sides was covered with carved ideographs, the top was rounded and carved in the form of a dragon's head, and the intaglio at the bottom seemed to be a seal in both Chinese and Mongol characters.

Hume glanced around. There was nothing else in the place, and it seemed self-evident that this jade seal was the thing which he must carry away. So, flinching a trifle despite the fur mittens on his hands, he leaned forward and wrested the thing away from the dead fingers which had gripped it for uncounted years, and thrust it into a pocket.

A moment afterward he emerged in the open air, sent another glance around the empty hilltop, and then strode back to where he had left the stilts. He was still far from penetrating the veil that shrouded this mystery, but the thing was done and over, and in the valley below and the wide steppes lay the remainder of the story to be told.

Hume sat on a boulder to get his stilts adjusted. Until he got some distance down the cañon he would be unable to see his companions, although he could look out across far leagues of empty steppe, stretching into illimitable distance, with the mountains to north and east and northwest. As on the previous day, clouds were again gathering heavily in the north, and Hume felt an uneasy conviction that this second storm would not blow over fruitlessly as the first had done.

"No time to lose!" he muttered, catching up his pole and rising on the stilts. "If we get off at once, we'll be all right. And I'll wager that we'll be at Zain or Kalgan before that rascally Kaigor Beyli has got his Chinese bandits on the march!"

Then he paused, his eye caught by a tiny scintillating glitter on the steppe, some five miles distant. It came again, and again. He had left his binoculars with Patrick, yet he was certain that this glitter came from the rifles or accouterments of men. He glanced at the sun—time had gone rapidly since he had left the camp below. With an impatient exclamation, he started down the declivity. The jade seal was in the side pocket of his jacket.

Haste nearly proved his undoing, however. He was half-way across the danger-zone, and was wondering why he did not come in sight of the camp below, when a misstep among some loose stones all but sent him down; only a frantic lunge upon the pole saved him. As it was, the stilt on his right foot had cracked and splintered, threatening to go at any instant.

The acute danger rallied him. He went on more slowly, cautiously, testing the right stilt under every step. He was no longer seeking the camp; all his faculties were centered on that frail support under his right foot. Now, fifty feet away, he saw the bodies of the two rabbits who had died to direct him aright. At this instant the cracked stilt gave way completely.

Hume balanced himself between the pole and his left stilt, sweat running into his eyes; fear gripped him, held him paralyzed. He looked for Namki, but the Kalmuck was not to be seen. Then, nerving himself to the effort, Hume went precariously forward, hopping, leaning on the pole, dreading

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with every instant lest he lose his balance and topple over. Twice he was near going down, and once he clung to the pole, desperately seeking footing as he swayed; then he realized that the two rabbits were at his feet, and he swung forward in blind panic, and came down with a crash.

He rolled over and sat up, finding himself almost beside his discarded fur-coat, and after a moment fell to work at the fastenings of the stilts. Freed of these, he examined the jade seal, which had given him a considerable bruise in his fall; it was uninjured, and coat in hand he rose, looking about for Mamki.

He looked in vain, however, and as he stared down toward the camp, he gaped in utter amazement. For the camp was gone. The herd of horses, the fire, the figures of Marie and Patrick—they were as if wiped out completely.

VIII

STUPEFIED for a moment, Hume glanced about the lower ground, and found nothing. Then he started down the widening ravine, his brain in a turmoil of fear and conjecture and wild surmise. He slipped on his coat and increased his pace until he was running.

Then, a moment afterward, he perceived a moving object below. A gasp of relief broke from him, and he checked his long strides, recognizing the figure of Patrick climbing toward him. He uttered a shout, and Patrick looked up with a wave of the hand, as if in reassurance.

The two men drew nearer. Hume saw that his friend was breathing heavily, and called out a question. Patrick only waved his hand again, until he came to a pause and rested.

"Where's every one?" demanded Hume, reaching the other's side.

"Gone," said Patrick. "Whew! I've worked like a dog with those cursed horses——"

"Gone? Where?"

"Zain. Here, take a look due south, to the left of that hillock."

Patrick handed over the binoculars, and pointed in the direction indicated. Hume focused the glasses. After a moment he picked up a group of fur-muffled horsemen, grouped about one rider whose mount was a superb white racing camel. The horsemen were in uniform, though he could not make it out because of the furs. This party numbered a dozen, and behind the hillock mentioned by Patrick he descried another party. They were perhaps three miles distant.

"Well?" Hume lowered the glasses. "They're coming in this direction—I made out the flash of rifles some time ago, from up above here. Where is Marie?"

Patrick got out his pipe and filled it.

"Namki caught the glitter also, and warned me," he explained. "So I sent up a thicker smoke with some dung——"

"But that would draw those riders!"

"Sure," said Patrick, and grinned slightly. "That's Kaigor Beyli with his Chinese bandits, though they are apparently in Mongol uniform. Well, somebody had to stay here to look after you, so I was elected. Namki and Marie struck out for Zain, taking the gold and the Black Stone. There's a garrison at Zain, and they can send us help from there. The idea is to draw Kaigor on us while they escape—I recognized that cursed white camel of his——"

Hume stood in silence. Once more the lines of bitterness crept in about his eyes; the feeling returned upon him that an invincible fate was stalking him relentlessly, to destroy every fresh happiness and hope that arose to lure him on.

Then shame seized him and wakened new manhood, as he realized what the words of Patrick cloaked. He knew well enough that Patrick was afraid, bitterly afraid, of this Mongol prince Kaigor; yet it was Patrick who had remained here with him, deliberately waiting to fall into the hands of Kaigor Beyli! Perhaps there was some plan already formed in that crafty brain of Patrick's. And Namki, who might have remained with nothing to fear, had gone to guide Marie to Zain, running the gantlet of Kaigor's force, which must have been scattered in a wide net to catch the party. Hume drew in a deep breath, and a smile came to his lips.

"Thanks, old man," he said quietly, including in the word many unuttered things which Patrick understood perfectly. "You mean to ride on and fall into their hands?"

"And gain time," assented Patrick with a curt nod. "Kaigor saw me in Urga, so there's no fooling him; our only chance is a bold play. I have that herd of horses hidden down among the rocks, and there's no hurry. Let him come on——"

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"But you've extinguished the fire!"

"Sure." Patrick chuckled. "I sent up a good smoke, and then wiped it out suddenly, as though we had caught the alarm and were trying to hide. That is sure to draw in all Kaigor's men at this point. Well, what luck up above? Anybody there?"

Recalled to his own recent experiences; Hume swore softly.

"Yes, confound you—a mummy! Who or what he was I've no idea, except that he was one of Jenghis Khan's descendants, from his size. He had this between his hands."

With some effort, for he still wore his mittens, Hume took the jade seal from his pocket. Patrick did not take it from him, but merely frowned and shook his head.

"Put it away. I don't know what it is, but those chaps in Urga knew, all right! And now listen to more important stuff; if we are to carry this thing through with Kaigor Beyli, watch your step! Those Mongol lamas are the very —— with poisons, as you know, and he's one of the chief Ta Lamas of Gelong rank—that is, doctors. They make use of gloves, bridle-reins, boots, books, anything and everything! The Borgias weren't in it with these birds. So watch out for his little tricks."

Hume nodded thoughtfully, as he put away the seal. He knew that Patrick spoke truth, since the poison-science of the lama doctors was feared throughout Asia.

Since the shape, size and weight of the jade seal precluded any thought of hiding it, Hume slipped it again into his pocket. The seal, like its present owners, must take the chances of war. As soon as the telltale stilts had been flung away among the rocks, Patrick turned down-hill, and they started to regain the horses, which had been concealed among some boulders to the right. As they went, Patrick briefly outlined his plan, such as it was; for as he himself admitted, much would depend upon circumstances. Hume promptly declared it absolute folly.

"Very well," and Patrick shrugged. "Better it if you can."

"No can do."

Hume broke into a laugh and clapped his friend on the shoulder.

"We'll go ahead with it, you old rascal, and trust to luck. They should have named you Ulysses!"

"Not much. Ulysses was a liar pure and simple—couldn't tell the truth even when it was to his advantage. What's the odds, so long as Marie gets safe to Zain? All we need is a little time."

"Right," said Hume. "Scared?"

"Scared stiff." Patrick grimaced, and pointed. "There's the herd. I got your horse saddled up, so go ahead and I'll follow. If they don't put a bullet into you on sight, we've a chance—and they'll not do that, since they don't know you. If I went first, it'd be different. Good luck!"

"Same to you," rejoined Hume, and swung up into his saddle.

He rode slowly to the south, rifle slung over his back, not looking around; Patrick could be depended upon to do his share of the work. It was now past noon, and all the sky to the north was dun and gray with the sunlight glimmering on great masses of clouds, though the southern sky was not yet overcast. Having been unable to make out any sign of Namki and Marie, Hume forced all his attention to the meeting ahead.

Having his glasses once more, he kept a sharp watch on the slightly broken country ahead, that went rolling down to merge into the steppes. Presently he caught sight of the white camel and the surrounding group of horsemen; he was, at the moment, at the crest of a slight rise in the ground, too low to be called a hill. Looking around, he saw Patrick a quarter of a mile in his rear, and waved his hand. An answering wave went up from the dark mass of horses which Patrick was driving forward, and Hume slowly walked his horse down the gentle slope ahead. The ground here was excellently suited to Patrick's wild scheme.

The enemy had perceived his advancing figure, and seeing this he came to an abrupt halt. This was the first time that he had felt the slightest hope of Patrick's plan going through; as he glanced around and saw how the ground favored him, how he was there in full sight of Kaigor Beyli and Patrick still hidden behind the knoll, he began to laugh amusedly at the very audacity of the thing and its actual chance of success.

The dozen horsemen around the camel spurred forward, while Kaigor himself followed more cautiously. Hume watched them come, sitting quietly in his saddle, even taking out his pipe and calmly lighting it. Farther away, a second party of

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horsemen was coming up, and Hume conjectured that all told Kaigor did not have two dozen men at hand, though no doubt others were even then converging on the spot.

As the riders came close, Hume saw that they were all Chinese. There were regiments of Chinese in Mongol pay, of course; but little details showed Hume that these, as Patrick had said, were brigands from the desert to the south. Despite their attempt at uniform they carried a diversity of arms, while here and there were bits of looted splendor which betrayed their actual character. These were not the coolie troops of Urga.

They came dashing up with ready rifles, but Hume's calm scrutiny puzzled and daunted them, and they drew rein with a flood of questions and orders in Chinese and Mongolian. He gathered that he was supposed to accompany them to their chief, and laughed at them.

"Children of Han, has the strong sunlight of the Gobi blinded you?" he said mockingly. "Have you never seen Russian soldiers in your country of red rocks? Go back and tell Kaigor Beyli that he may advance in safety and speak with me. And if he does not believe that three-score Russian rifles are covering you, let him take warning."

Hume turned in his saddle and whistled shrilly. The bandits stared at him, wondering at that marvelous ermine coat—then a cry burst from them. Over the ridge Patrick came riding, and behind him, to the right and left, showed the heads of horses in groups, as if held by chosen men while their riders had dismounted. To the yellow men, this was all too evidently a trap into which they had ridden.

Patrick rode up, drew rein, and saluted. Hume addressed him in Mongolian, that the others might understand.

"Kaigor Beyli comes to talk with me. If these yellow dogs attempt any tricks, open fire. If not, order the men to stay where they are."

Patrick turned and went trotting back up the hill. The yellow men waited for no more, but fled back to the slowly advancing camel, shouting their news as they went. Meantime, Hume saw a gleam of light on his own past misfortunes, and wondered that he had not perceived it before this. Chinese bandits had destroyed his expedition—suddenly and amazedly, here in Mongolia where the Chinese were a hated and despised race, and where the expedition was working under full security from the Living Buddha at Urga. A band of wandering Russian reds had finished the job; but those yellow bandits—had they been Kaigor Beyli's men, these same Gobi riders with whom the prince was in alliance and secret treaty?

Recalling his thoughts from these past matters, Hume inspected the man on the white camel, who was approaching him alone; the horsemen remained a little distance away. So far, the stratagem had worked admirably, and in the brownish Mongolian features of the Noyon, Prince Kaigor, there lay a scowling acceptance of the trap into which he had come. Those features were not prepossessing. The narrow-slitted, full eyes, the large nostrils and heavy lips, the combination of brutish cruelty and swift intelligence that the whole face expressed, were all indicative of the crafty ferocity in the man's heart. Kaigor glanced up to where Patrick sat his horse on the hill crest, with an occasional horse's head to right and left behind, and then darted a look and a word at Hume.

"What is this? How does that man come with you? He is a traitor and a spy."

Hume took his time about answering, puffing reflectively at his pipe and eying the man and the white camel, whose trappings were adorned with bits of red and yellow cloth to proclaim the rank of the Noyon. Kaigor himself wore a plain black robe and cap, beneath his furs. His only ornament was a large silver swastika on the front of his cap.

"All that is nothing to you," said Hume at length. He held up the jade ring. "It is your place to obey."

"That ring was not given you to carry!" snapped the prince angrily.

"So?" Hume smiled at him. "You see that mountain behind me? I have just come from the top of it. The Black Stone has been brought from the land of demons and has gone on to Urga. I tell you again, it is your place to obey the bearer of this ring! What is more to the point, Kaigor Beyli, you may imagine fifty rifles hidden in the grass along this ridge—and obey them."

At these words, the prince changed countenance. A slight pallor passed over his face.

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"You—you have come from the sacred mountain!" he muttered, staring at Hume.

During this dialog the sun became veiled from sight behind the advancing fringe of storm-cloud. The northern sky was black as ink.

"What is it you desire?" asked Kaigor, dropping his arrogant air.

"Your surrender. Tell those *hunghutze* of yours, those bandits who have come from the Gobi under your protection, to throw down their rifles. Tell them to turn and flee, lest I pour bullets after them. As for you, Kaigor, you shall come to Urga with me."

Fright seized the Mongol prince. He tried to hide it by a display of temper.

"What talk is this? —— take you! For this you shall be impaled beside a dog—"

"Very well."

Hume shrugged and caught up the reins of his horse, and turned. He lifted his hand and shouted to Patrick—

"Open fire at once——"

"No, no!" cried out Kaigor in sharp accents. "Let there be peace between us. My tents are only a couple of miles away. Come and talk."

"Tell your men to fling down their rifles and go," said Hume coldly.

The prince bit his lip, snarled at Hume, and then twisted about in his saddle. Now, in the very instant that he raised his voice to obey the order, the heavens were ripped asunder by a terrific lightning-stroke; and before the crash of the bolt died out, Hume was once again in the grip of disaster.

The pack of horses, frightened by the bolt and the thunder, burst over the brow of the ridge. Before Hume realized what had happened, Kaigor Beyli uttered one shrill yell and whipped out an automatic, and then came chaos.

THE splitting crash of that thunderbolt wrenching across the sky drew Hume's involuntary glance, and this fraction of a second spelled ruin for him. The frightened horses came dashing across the ridge, bearing Patrick with them. Kaigor, desperately alive to any chance of escape from the supposed trap, saw in a flash that the horses were not saddled, saw that the whole snare was an audacious game of bluff—and began firing. His men were swift to follow suit.

Hume's horse screamed and plunged down as bullets ripped into him, and Hume himself was flung headlong to the ground, though untouched. The shock dazed him; as he staggered to his feet, the bandits were all around, and half a dozen hide ropes settled over him. The nooses drew tight, binding arms and neck and legs, throttling and dragging him. He had a vision of the bandits pouring bullets into the mad herd of horses; wild with slaughter, the yellow men volleyed death into the mass. The herd, looped together by thongs, were dragged to a halt by the weight of their own dead fellows. Then, for Hume, everything was blotted out.

Kaigor yelled shrill orders. One group of his men went spurring over the ridge to make certain no opponents were concealed there; such of the horses as yet lived were cut loose and roped for driving to camp; Patrick, flung from his horse in the stampede and trampled underfoot, was dragged up and bound. Kaigor Beyli inspected his two unconscious captives, ordered them tied to spare horses, and when the scouts returned with word that the coast was clear, started back to camp. Another rippling roll of thunder swept across the heavens, and the northern hills were blotted out by the advancing storm of rain. Kaigor speeded up his racing camel, and the horsemen spurred into a mad gallop, but that white, spidery-legged beast kept ahead of them like a dim wraith of the storm.

In this race with nature, man won. Kaigor's black tent had been pitched in the shelter of some massive boulders, and near the *yurt* were the tents of his men, all erected by half a dozen of the bandits who had remained for the work. The tents of the desert men, however, were amazing in number; there were nearly twoscore scattered about, and the large number of baggage-horses picketed near by aided in conveying the impression that Kaigor had a much larger force of men than appeared following him.

Hume came to his senses to find himself lying under a small shelter-tent, with the rain pelting around. He was still in his ermine coat, trussed from neck to heels, and it was clear that his captors had been too busy to bother either with him or Patrick. Their shouts reached him, and he comprehended that they were pegging down the tents against the whirl of wind and rain

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that drove out of the north, and attending to the horses.

Beside him lay Patrick, and Hume twisted about until he got on one side and could see his friend. He found Patrick staring at him from a face that was a mask of blood and mud.

"Hurt?" he inquired.

"Black and blue all over, by the feel," said Patrick. "Didn't that bolt play —— with us, though?"

Hume laughed. He fought off a return of that frightful feeling that an imponderable but relentless doom was pursuing him, and faced the situation with his old grimly cheerful humor. Well he knew in what anguish poor Patrick was lying at this moment.

"Don't enjoy impalement ahead of time——"

"Huh!" grunted Patrick. "This —— Kaigor only impales 'em around Urga. The best we'll get will be ropes from wrists and ankles and a horse at the end of each rope."

"Well, that's short and sweet," commented Hume. "Besides, we're not dead yet. Marie and Namki are on the road to Zain, and we may still be able to stave off matters. The Mongols will be dead anxious to catch this crowd of bandits when they hear Namki's tale. Cheer up! We sure had Kaigor bluffed. He was ordering his men to beat it when that thunderbolt chipped into the game. Can you see what's going on?"

Patrick lay at the edge of the shelter, and peered out beneath it, for the hide-tent did not come quite to the ground.

"Rainstorm, and everybody running around. "Confound it, they've go tall that wine I fetched along, and our grub to boot! —— of a mess."

"They'll get around to us after a bit," said Hume. "I fancy Kaigor will want to have a chat before he begins the execution. He was all stirred up over my statement that I had just come from the sacred mountain."

"You told him that?" exclaimed Patrick. "Then flash that jade seal on him. He'll know what it is even if we don't. We may be able to stave off things for a while, anyhow."

"Courage, friends, the devil is dead!" quoted Hume, and laughed a little. "From you, most noble Denys, a word of cheer is worth a volume from any other man!"

Patrick squinted, then recalled the allusion, and grinned.

"Oh! Well, I am not a brave man like Burgundian. Lord, but it's twenty years since I read that story of Reade's! Plenty of cloisters in this cursed land, but mighty few hearths. Still, I admit that I have a fair brain. Listen to those chaps yell! I fancy that few of them speak Mongolian, though they may understand it in spots; they seem to be using a bastard Kansu dialect. Here come two of the brutes. Now for fleas, —— them!"

A moment afterward, two of the bandits crawled beneath the shelter, cursing the rain and cold wind. They were officers, to judge from their garb and bits of loot, and had been appointed to watch the two prisoners, though they did no more than glare at Hume and Patrick and discuss the chances of loot after Kaigor had finished with the pair. They produced tiny Chinese sleeve-pipes and lighted them. Presently Patrick, who spoke several dialects, addressed the two officers in Kansu, which they understood perfectly.

"Oh sons of turtles, you need not think that you will have the looting of us! Do you not know that we came from the sacred mountain of the Buriats? And that we are under the protection of the demons? Well, you can see the storm that you have raised by injuring us."

The two, although they laughed and grinned at this speech, were somewhat disturbed by it. One of them spat at Patrick angrily, his laugh passing into a black scowl.

"You lie, red dog! The Noyon has power over the demons. Is he not a Ta Lama, a great doctor? They obey him, as those ropes around you prove."

Patrick chuckled.

"These ropes are only suffered to bring about your destruction, yellow dog from the red-rock desert! Yours, and Kaigor's, and that of your whole band. When we so desire, we shall burst these bonds and depart, and you will all be dead. Aye, when the demon of the sacred mountain has smitten Kaigor with death, then you and your men shall be smitten likewise, and bullets shall flail you south again!"

These words drove fear into the two men, and one of them silenced Patrick with a blow across the face. Like all their breed, they were superstitious in the extreme; they fell to talking with each other in low

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tones, and presently the man who had struck Patrick went out into the rain, which was coming down in sheets, and returned after a little with some strips of jerked meat and a large pannikin of tea. He unbound both prisoners so that they could eat and drink, and spoke to Patrick in a humbled voice.

"Honorable sir, I did wrong to strike you. Accept this reparation."

"So you're afraid, eh?" Patrick gave him a sharp glance. "Shall I tell you how to escape the demons?"

The other grunted.

"Demons? Bah! There are more demons in a square mile of the desert than in all these Mongolian hills! Still, if you have a charm that I might take when you are dead——"

"Not at all," said Patrick. "I don't intend to die. If you wish to escape, mount your horse at the first opportunity and ride south. That is the only way you can save yourself."

When he and Hume had eaten, they were bound again, and firmly, though their ankles were left free. All this while, the second officer had watched them with drawn pistol. While it was plain that Patrick's words had left a deep impression, these men were not such fools as to accept them at full face-value.

In the midst of the gusty rain a new party of riders, a dozen in all, came into camp with much shouting and cursing; they came to peer at the captives, then rushed away in haste to get warm by fires and find food. After a time Patrick fell to questioning about the details of what Hume had seen on the mountain, and Hume told him. Patrick shook his head over the mummy.

"Queer! I can understand his position, since he was feeling the jade—must have died in the act. It's probably some devilish old relic; the Living Buddha has a ring that Jenghis Khan wore, and other things. Jade of that color isn't found nowadays, either."

Hume nodded. The fondness of Far Eatsern peoples for jades and carven things lies both in the sense of sight and in that of touch. A bit of jade that has been fondled and rubbed by human hands for a score of years, or a hundred, or a thousand, acquires a peculiar and remarkable patina—from the secretions of the skin, say those who know. As fine porcelain is tested less by sight than by a tap of the fingernail, so the rare old jade of China, far and away different from the Khotan or Yunnan jade of commerce, is tested by a rub of the thumb and a tender, loving touch of the palm. It was not strange, therefore, that this ancient man on the mountain-top had died in the very act of fondling his treasure. Hume expressed a wonder as to who had set those triangles of green jade in the mummy's eyes, but to this was no answer then or later.

The sheets of rain lessened. Thunder rolled across the sky, jagged lightning flashed incessantly. The yellow men spoke of frost and snow to come, and the necessity of changing from horses to camels; of raids and rapine and loot, of women and war and the wizardry that obtains from the northern hills to the southern jungles. Then, just as shouts were going up from the other tents, and the officers stooped forward to look at the rain turning into snow as it fell, a guard came up briskly and stated that Kaigor Beyli desired the captives.

Wrists lashed behind their backs, Hume and Patrick were dragged to unbound feet and escorted forth. They still wore their fur-coats, for not a hand had touched them since their capture; even their weapons, save rifles, were intact. Now the officers went over them and removed knives and pistols, but touched no loot; obviously, these men were in sore dread of the prince.

While they crossed the open space toward the black skin *yurt* of the Noyon, some of the late arrivals crowded out to stare at the two prisoners. Then a ripple of shouts was sent up. Hume, seeing one and all of the Chinese turn to gaze westward, followed their looks and perceived in the distance a dim blot of figures against the lowered horizon. While he could see nothing of detail, for the mingled rain and snow blurred all things, he understood that another detached band of the yellow men was in sight.

"More of the devils coming in," said Patrick in English, after an eager, straining look at the distant riders. "Thought it might be our men from Zain, but no such luck. Afternoon's half-gone, anyhow. Look at these fools! Not a guard posted, and in enemy country. If Namki only brings help, they'll wipe out these bandits!"

Hume grunted. The next instant they were shoved inside the *yurt*.

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IX

THE black tent, while low, was of good size and was slightly warmed by a brazier of charcoal. It was evident that whenever Kaigor Beyli rode with these bandits of whom he was in secret the leader, his luxury was not overlooked.

The Noyon himself sat at the far end of the tent, like a graven image of Buddha, clad all in his black gown, only the upturned toes of his heavy felt boots protruding. That black and motionless figure was sinister, particularly so in the flickering light of the smoking temple-candle of painted fat which illumined the dark interior of the tent. About his waist, Kaigor wore two holstered automatics. At either side of him was a Mongol servant, prostrated, face to ground.

"Stage all set," muttered Patrick gloomily.

Kaigor addressed his officers, in Kansu Chinese.

"These men are not armed? Good. Give them each a cup of wine from that kettle yonder, then depart. My own servants will guard the door. Prepare two stakes for these men."

Going to the brazier, above which was suspended a kettle, the officers filled two large wooden cups with wine, heated in Chinese fashion. They brought the cups to the two captives and held them up.

"Safe enough," said Patrick, catching a glance from Hume, "and we need it."

The wine was warming and invigorating, and Hume was glad of it. He was puzzled by this kindness, coupled as it was with the threat of the stake, but Kaigor did not long leave him in doubt. When the officers had departed, the prince spoke a word to his two Mongol servants, who rose, picked up rifles, and went to the entrance of the *yurt*. They vanished outside, where they remained on guard, and Kaigor was alone with his captives.

He looked directly at Patrick, and spoke grimly.

"Of you, Redchin, I heard and saw much in Urga, though you did not see me. I know that you are a coward, though you are also very crafty and a good liar, and cunning as the badger himself. I do not wish to talk with you, but with your friend here. You are thinking that your messengers will bring help from Zain, yet I can tell you that they will not do so, for I have sent to catch them long ere this. Now be silent, for if you speak you shall feel the stake instantly."

Patrick made no response but seemed to freeze where he stood. Hume felt a cold chill of fear creep over him at Kaigor's words; then, with an effort, he banished it. There was nothing astonishing in this display of mind-reading—it was a thing, not to fear, but to take warning from. He was not at all certain that Kaigor could read his mind, either, since all his thought was for Marie's safety, and the prince had not mentioned a woman.

"Now, tall man, tell me who you are and where from," said Kaigor, turning to Hume.

The latter complied. He gave his name, and spoke of the expedition, and at this Kaigor suddenly showed a trace of animation.

"By the Living Buddha, now I remember!" he exclaimed. "So you are that man!"

Hume laughed a little.

"Noyon, why did you not know this, if you can read minds?"

"Ah! Well, perhaps I wanted to keep that red dog quiet, yonder."

The trace of a malignant smile showed in the brutish features, as Kaigor glanced at Patrick.

"At all events I can read his mind. You are another person. I like you. That was good wine you brought with you; I had some given you in order to show that I am willing to make terms with you. But I want nothing to do with that red dog."

"He is my friend," said Hume. "His fate is mine."

Kaigor stared fixedly at him for a moment, then abruptly changed the subject.

"You nearly caught me on that hill. What did you intend to do after I surrendered?"

"Take you to Urga," said Hume promptly.

The Mongol grinned.

"So! Well, you came from the sacred mountain. What did you get there?"

"Let us talk first of our fate," said Hume. "What do you intend to do with us?"

"Kill you," responded Kaigor. "By the stake if you will not talk. By a bullet if you will talk."

"Give us two days——"

"Not two hours," said the prince abruptly. "I know what is in your mind, but you

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will not be rescued. The moment this affair is finished, I leave here. These fools of Chinese are afraid of the snow, and they will remain until the storm is over. Let them stay, then! You two men die. You have a choice between slow death and quick death. Take it."

Hume perceived that the words were in earnest. He bowed to the inevitable.

"Very well, Noyon, let us talk. Give my friend another cup of wine, for it cheers him. I want no more myself."

"Good! You are sensible."

The prince clapped his hands. One of the two servants came into the tent, and at Kaigor's order refilled a cup from the kettle and held it to the lips of Patrick until it was emptied. Then the servant prostrated himself.

"Speak!" ordered Kaigor impatiently.

"Lord, the detachment of Ung Hoy is returning, but very slowly."

"Do not disturb me except for something important," snapped Kaigor. "Go!"

The servant withdrew. Kaigor took one of the holstered pistols from its place at his girdle, and laid it in his lap. His eyes struck on Hume.

"Now come here. Where is the thing you brought from the sacred mountain?"

Hume stepped forward until he was in front of the prince.

"In the left side pocket of my coat."

A glitter of eagerness in his eyes, Kaigor leaned forward. Hume considered giving him a kick, but the automatic jerked up and he knew the idea was useless. With one hand, Kaigor explored until he found the heavy jade seal, and then jerked it into sight.

"Go back where you were!"

Hume obeyed. The Mongol sucked in his breath, stole swift glances at the jade seal, laid it in his lap, ran his hand over it. In his face lay awe and wonder and reverence.

"What is it?" demanded Hume.

Kaigor's head jerked up.

"What! You do not know?"

Hume shook his head silently. Patrick was listening to all this most intently, yet in deep silence, not daring a word.

"Tell me what you found there—did you see the demon?" asked Kaigor. "The demon with green jade eyes, as others have reported?"

Hume laughed at that, and told very simply of what he had found in the hut. The prince listened in frowning silence, and nodded when Hume had finished.

"Others have been sent for this thing," he said, touching the seal. "They were afraid to take it from the hand of the dead man, whom they thought to be a demon. Men who would not have been afraid, could not ascend the mountain. How did you do it?"

"Because, I think," said Hume reflectively, "I was under Divine protection."

He really meant the words; Kaigor perceived this, and showed a sudden trace of fear. He did not know that Hume's thoughts had reverted to Marie in this moment when death was both close and certain. Kaigor was thinking of the concrete ascent of the mountain when he put the question; Hume, replying, was thinking of the entire journey.

"Where is the Black Stone?" demanded Kaigor, caressing the seal as he spoke.

"In Zain by this time, on the way to Urga," said Hume.

"You lie!" snapped the Mongol angrily. "You have not succeeded in getting it—there was no time! This is some trick of that red dog's yonder! Come, tell the truth!"

Patrick's foot moved slightly and struck that of Hume. The latter took the hint.

"Perhaps you are right, Noyon," he said, and laughed good-humoredly. "It is evident that you can read minds, after all!"

Kaigor Beyli leaned back and looked extremely satisfied with himself.

"So!" he remarked. "You understand, I do not wish that Stone to reach Urga—nor this seal of green jade. Now, it is evident that you are a greater man than this red dog. He has given you the sacred ring of Prince Jassaktu, which you wear; and it was you who ascended the sacred mountain, not he. Come! I will make a bargain with you, for I can not trust these accursed Chinese once they are out of my sight."

He paused, and cocked his head slightly as a great tumult began to arise from the camp outside. There were shouts and yells, squealing of horses, laughter.

"Ung Hoy's men are in," said Kaigor, and a thin smile twisted his lips. "Now listen! I will make a bargain with you. You do not know what this jade is, but I do. It is the seal of Jenghis Khan, and for many centuries has been on that mountain. You

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comprehend? The seal of the great Jenghis himself!"

Patrick caught his breath; Hume, unmoved, only nodded. He knew that Kaigor very probably spoke the truth about the seal.

"The princes want this in Urga. They have wanted it, and their fathers, and their fathers' fathers—and now it is here in my lap!" Kaigor's voice rose exultantly. "It must not go to Urga. Jade can not be destroyed, it can not be broken, it can not be burned. You are a man whom I can trust. You shall have your life. You shall take this jade seal and go into the Gobi with these men of mine, and bury this seal or throw it into a river where no one shall ever find it. I can not do this. I am watched, my own men would see me do this and might recover the seal. Besides, there might be a curse upon me. To you such things do not matter. You can do it and even if my men see the action they will think little of it. Then, when it's done you shall go free."

"My friend also?" queried Hume!

Despite this fantastic offer, despite its whole aura of unreality, it was meant literally. Kaigor Beyli was a Mongol and spoke with the tongue and brain and beliefs of his race. Being a traitor in Chinese pay, he wished to prevent this historic relic ever reaching Urga; once there, like the far-famed ring of Jenghis, it would have an incalculable moral effect upon the nomad tribes, bolstering up the authority of the Living Buddha more than ever.

"The red dog dies," snapped the prince.

"Then I refuse," said Hume steadily.

"What!" Kaigor stared at him. "You would sooner die here with him?"

"His fate is my fate," said Hume.

"Then take the fate you desire," cried out Kaigor, in a fury, and clapped his hands. Even as he did so, however, a sudden tumult and sound of voices uprose at the entrance of the tent, and into the *yurt* strode a bandit officer with a wild cry to the prince. He was a grinning, exultant Chinaman, and his shout held a gusty license and freedom, even as his action in flinging aside the guards betrayed. This was Ung Hoy, commander of the bandits under the prince.

He snapped out a few words which brought to Kaigor's sinister face a vivid gleam of triumph. Hume did not understand the speech, but he heard a gasping groan burst from Patrick, at his elbow, and turned to find his friend's face ghastly under its mud and blood. Then Kaigor whipped out a sharp command, and the entrance to the *yurt* was suddenly all crowded with men trying to enter.

After that, Hume saw only the white face of Marie Musvitch, who was brought in, bound and senseless, and dropped at the feet of Kaigor Beyli.

X

AT THE entrance of the bandit chief, Kaigor Beyli had swiftly covered the jade seal from sight with the cuffs of his long coat-sleeves. He sat motionless, listening to the breathless report, his eyes fastened upon the unconscious girl at his feet.

Patrick, meantime, was breathing out a low translation for Hume's benefit, though his jerky words barely concealed groans of utter despair.

"Laid an ambush—caught them by the river—Namki drowned or shot, not sure which—got the stone and the gold—oh, ——! It's all up now. Last hope gone."

His voice dwindled away and died.

Hume stood silent, seeing with quick relief that Marie was unhurt. He found it hard to realize that this was actual fact, and no vision. Somehow, the deep faith of this girl had convinced him that a higher power was watching over her, perhaps over them all; and even now, when all was lost, he found that blind conviction struggling to assert itself against the bitter reason which told him the end was at hand.

Kaigor was too crafty to let his men know that the Black Stone had any particular value, so he ordered Ung Hoy to place it under guard with the gold and other loot until his pleasure might be made known. He had, for the moment, forgotten his intention of executing Patrick and Hume immediately. He had, in fact, forgotten nearly everything except the face and figure of the girl at his feet, until a sharp laugh and a too bold word from the bandit chief aroused him.

"A Ta Lama," said Ung Hoy, with a suspicion of sardonic mockery, "is not supposed to be interested in women. So, Noyon, when you have finished looking at this virgin and have remembered your holiness, I shall be pleased to take her——"

Kaigor Beyli looked up. It was as if a

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veil had dropped over his face, so stony and hard had his features become; he swiftly twisted a ring on his hand until the bezel was showing—the set was a glittering, gaudy stone that reflected the candlelight as does an imitation, tinsel-backed diamond. The words died on the lips of Ung Hoy, who stared at the ring. His men quietly stole out of the tent, leaving him alone.

Hume, likewise caught in that trap before he thought, looked at the ring until the voice of Kaigor reached him in dreamy accents.

"Too bold, Ung Hoy, too bold! This is not the first time you have dared me too far, but it is the last. Now let the demons take you!"

Hume actually saw something take shape in the air above the charcoal brazier—the figure of a man, which became flesh and leaped to the ground, and hurled itself upon Ung Hoy. A strange, choking cry burst from the lips of the bandit. He jerked out his automatic, but that shadowy figure caught his wrist, held him helpless, twisted away the pistol. The yellow man writhed terribly, and then his groping fingers jerked out his knife. He struck with it, and the blade went through the shadowy figure. Then it seemed that a thin, mocking laugh rang out, and the figure gripped the knife-hand of Ung Hoy and bent it back and down until the blade drove home. The bandit doubled up and fell, struck through the throat. The shadowy figure vanished.

Kaigor Beyli clapped his hands sharply. Hume started, blinked, saw nothing but the dead figure lying there, hand still gripped to knife-haft. He stole a horrified glance at Patrick, but the latter was only watching Kaigor with a puzzled frown. Patrick met his look, and his eyes widened on Hume.

"Did you see it?" demanded the latter hoarsely.

"Did you fall for that mesmerism stuff?" Patrick uttered a rasping laugh. "Forget it! Any lama can pull that kind of work."

The two servants had entered and, at an order from the prince, were carrying out the body of the bandit chief. Hume collected himself. He perceived that he, like Ung Hoy, had only seen what the prince willed him to see. This trick was an elementary form of Mongol magic; Hume recalled the stories of the famous Tushegun Lama, who sent his armies into battle with such visions inspiring them. Ung Hoy had been led to slay himself, that was all.

The voice of Kaigor, addressing him, once more roused Hume. He found the servants gone, the prince watching him with a mocking look.

"So you tasted my power, did you? Very good. Now it seems that there is another matter about which we must talk before you are taken away."

As he spoke, Kaigor, who had put away his pistol, produced a knife from his sleeve and leaned forward. With the tiny blade he slit the cords that bound the arms of Marie and for a moment looked down into her face, intently. Then he straightened up and spoke to Hume.

"This woman pleases me. I shall take her to Urga with me. After her face is properly painted, she will not be so pale and ugly. I shall put her in my new palace, where there are electric lights and other comforts. Tell me who she is and all about her, and how you came to get the Black Stone. It is growing dark outside, and if your story pleases me you shall live until morning. Where did you get those sacks of gold?"

With this, the prince settled back complacently among the saddle-bags that supported him. He placed the jade seal in his lap and rubbed it softly with his palms, enjoying the feel of the marvelous patina as an Occidental might enjoy sensuous music.

Hume, however, realizing that everything was lost, became terribly calm.

"Listen to me, Noyon!" he said steadily. "If you wrong this girl, Heaven will surely punish you! Do not harm her. Let her go free, and I will do all that you ask. I will show you how to ascend the sacred mountain safely. I will show you how to pass the lake of demons and reach a wonderful hidden valley in which no Mongol has ever set foot for hundreds of years. I will do all that you ask of me, and more——"

He ceased speaking and wet his lips, for the smile that came upon the face of Kaigor was hideous in its mockery.

"So you desire this woman, do you?" said the prince softly. "Fool! Am I not a Ta Lama—do you take me for a superstitious camel-hunter, that you threaten me with supernatural vengeance? I know better. As for the things that you know, never fear; you will utter them all tomorrow

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morning, when you sit on the pointed stake and scream for death! Cease this folly, and tell me about the gold and the Black Stone and this woman. Or else I shall ask red dog yonder, for there is fear in his coward's eyes!"

Once again, Hume felt a touch of Patrick's foot against his.

"Ask him, then," he said curtly.

The prince shifted his intent gaze to Patrick, and smiled. It was not a nice smile.

"You feel the stake already, red dog? Speak. Tell me all the tale."

Patrick uttered a groan of fear, and came to his knees, anguish in his face. Hume stared at him, a little puzzled, then shifted his gaze to Marie and hoped that she would not waken soon. Presently, however, he understood that whatever might show in Patrick's face and voice, the man's crafty mind was as usual busily at work.

For, without protest, Patrick began to pour forth a tale to which Hume listened in a mingling of astonishment and cynical wonder. Sweat upon his face, panicky fright in his eyes and voice, Patrick mixed a very little truth with an immense amount of fiction, and related a long, rambling and involved story in purely Oriental style.

Incredulous amazement grew upon Hume as he listened, for he was interested despite everything, and never before had he heard Jim Patrick so absolutely inspired as at this moment. What the object could be, save to fight for time, he could not imagine; and even this object was now worth nothing, since the last hope was destroyed. Yet Patrick spoke with a desperate and tense earnestness which carried conviction. His tale meandered into the realm of demons and spirits, involved Namki the wizard, went into the life histories of several persons, and even dipped learnedly into the history of the Mongol peoples.

Patrick, indeed, was putting himself absolutely into his work, and Kaigor Beyli was fascinated. Like all men of the East, he thoroughly enjoyed a good story, and here was a better one than he had ever heard. He sat, smiling cattishly, his hands moving slowly across the jade seal in his lap; after a little his face settled into sterner lines and little by little he ceased to caress the jade. He appeared gripped in the intricacies of the tale, and his jet eyes were fastened upon Patrick's face in a level, unwinking stare.

This must have lasted a good twenty minutes. Marie's faint had presumably passed into slumber of exhaustion, for now she was as if peacefully sleeping, and there was even a smile upon her lips. Hume watched her with torturing agony in his heart. He was worse than helpless, and dreaded the moment when she should waken and see him standing there, and look for the aid that he could not give.

Patrick's voice was hoarse and dry now, for he had kept up a steady flow of words. His invention was as worn as his voice, and his tale drifted into a puerile relation about Hume's supposed battle with the demon on the mountain-top—then he came to an abrupt stop. In the silence, the smoky candle hissed as the grease melted.

Hume, startled by the cessation, saw Patrick stiffly get from his knees and rise. The figure of Kaigor Beyli did not move. He saw Patrick turn to him—turn a face that was twisted and contorted by emotion. As if in a dream, he heard the hoarse words.

"I've got to keep it up—those beggars outside. Wake her up—quietly! She's got to free us. Hurry up! That devil's dead—don't worry about him——"

And Patrick began to ramble on again with incoherent words, his voice hysterical.

XI

FOR one frightful instant Hume believed that his friend had gone stark mad, until he slowly comprehended that the throat of Kaigor Beyli was stiff and rigid, that the breast under the black soutane was no longer rising and falling with the breath of life. Even then he suspected some Mongol trick—thought that this was some delusion of the senses. Seeing Hume's stupefaction, Patrick laughed shrilly and then, without changing his level tone of voice, spoke rapidly.

"Don't stand there like a ninny! Get busy. We've got to copper those two servants or we're lost."

Hume moved quietly not to waken Marie. The long sleeves of his ermine coat still came down about his hands and wrists. An instant later the foul smell of burning hair rose into the *yurt*, as Hume carefully backed upon the candle and held his wrists above the smoky blaze.

"Good head!" said Patrick, who was recovering his poise. "Once rid of those two Mongols, we're safe for a while. After what

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happened to Ung Hoy, those yellow boys aren't going to disturb the prince in a hurry. Watch out that stink doesn't bring the servants!"

Hume took a step away from the candle and bent his strength against the hide-thongs. These, partially burned, gave way; his numbed hands were free. Rubbing his palms to restore circulation, Hume stepped over the form of Marie and leaned above the seated Kaigor Beyli. He did not pause to ask questions; one touch of that cold and death-frozen face showed him that the prince was dead indeed. Automatic in one hand and little sleeve knife in the other, he swung about and cut Patrick loose. The latter swiftly gestured to the entrance.

"Get ready—grab 'em! One will come first. Do it quick—now!"

Patrick clapped his hands, even while Hume was shedding the heavy coat.

Standing beside the entrance flap, pistol in hand, Hume raised his arm as the hide was shoved aside. The Mongol servant received the butt squarely in the temple, and pitched forward without a sound. Hume caught him, and laughed grimly.

Again Patrick clapped his hands, and raised his voice in imitation of Kaigor's snarling tone. Hume, holding the pistol as if to fire in air, again brought down the butt; there was no need to question whether that man lived or died. Hume snatched up his coat and flung it over the two bodies, for to put them outside was impossible unless attention were to be drawn. He straightened up and turned, to find Patrick seated on the ground and wiping his sweat-streaked mask of a face.

"My lord, how I wish that I wasn't a cursed coward!" groaned Patrick, and Hume's laugh rang out.

"Old fellow, I'd like a bit of your brand of courage, I can tell you! But come across. What did you do to Kaigor? What killed him, anyhow?"

"Time to play with that jade seal," said Patrick, helping himself generously to the hot wine. "It belonged to Jenghis Khan, as you heard him say. After you told me about the position in which you found that mummy, I had an inkling of the truth. Kaigor couldn't keep his hands off it—no man could, who appreciated such things! So I had to play for time, and won. That's all."

Hume frowned, and stepped to the side of the dead prince.

"The seal? But I don't get you——"

"Don't touch it!" snapped Patrick hastily. "Don't you see—there's a tiny sharp point somewhere about it, poisoned! The thing was made for murder, I tell you! No wonder those boys in Urga want to get hold of it. You said that you wore your mittens when you handled it; cursed lucky thing you did! Tuck that girl's coat about her throat, unless you want her to die from lying on this damp ground."

Hume laughed at his friend's manner, but arranged Marie's fur-coat so that it covered her breast. He rose and stood staring for a moment at Kaigor Beyli, then gingerly picked up the seal, using the skirt of his coat as a shield, and threw it to one side.

"Give me a hand here, Pat. Get him out of her sight."

They carried the body to those of the two servants, covering them all with their fur-coats, then stood and regarded each other for a moment. Patrick grinned.

"Now for a drink and a smoke, while we plan getting away! What's doing outside?"

Hume opened the flap and found everything in darkness, with fires twinkling on all sides. So reporting, he accepted the cup of wine that Patrick poured him, and downed it, then pulled out his pipe. By tacit consent, they forbore to waken Marie.

"How to get away? It can't be done," said Hume quietly. "They're all around us. A soft snow is falling."

"Besides," added Patrick thoughtfully, "we don't want to leave the black stone and the gold——"

"—— the stuff! If we could get away we'd go, but we can't," said Hume. "Still, things are a bit better. We've evaded the stake, at least! We have the rifles of those servants, and an automatic apiece. Now we can put up a fight before they down us."

Patrick frowned at the candle. After a moment he spoke.

"You're certain of that, eh? At the best, it's a fight?"

"Sure thing," said Hume promptly. "Not a chance in the world to get horses and beat it."

"All right."

Patrick rose, and from the saddle-bags took Kaigor's coat, which he wrapped about his figure. "There's a slim chance that we can scare those devils out—I'm going to

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take it. When I show up, don't start shooting."

With this, leaving Hume all astare, he slipped to the entrance and darted away into the night.

Hume got the two rifles and laid them ready to hand, then sat smoking. There was nothing to do but await the outcome of Patrick's sudden scheme, and he had no hope that it would work. At this moment he saw the girl's eyelids flutter, then she opened her eyes and, as Hume caught her hand in his, sat up. Her gaze widened upon him.

"You!" she said in a wondering voice. "You—once more! Oh, I knew that it would be so. I prayed for you to come——"

"Hush, Marie; here, drink this."

Hume held the cup of wine to her lips, and she swallowed some of the warm drink. Yet her words startled him strangely.

"Be careful! We're not safe by any means."

He was thankful that nothing but a pile of furs marked the three bodies. Her eyes swept the empty tent, then came back to him. She clasped both hands about his in a firm grip.

"I'm so glad!" she cried softly. "Where are we? What has happened?"

"Can't tell you now, Marie—things are moving fast. Wait till Patrick comes back. I expect we'll either be free or dead in the next ten minutes. Was Namki killed?"

"I don't know. It all came so suddenly; they sprang out all around us, and there was shooting—my horse was shot. I think Namki jumped into the river, but I can't make sure."

"Well, never mind." Hume patted her hand. "There's Patrick's voice. Sit up and hope for the best, dear girl! Not a word, now."

He released her hand and, picking up his pipe, assumed an air of nonchalance which he was far from feeling. Marie sat erect, looking at the entrance. Then—the flap was thrown back, and in the entrance stood that same officer who had struck Patrick and had later made amends for the blow. At his elbow was Patrick, speaking swiftly while the officer stared in startled astonishment at the scene.

"I warned you!" said Patrick harshly. "Now, as you can see for yourself, the demons have smitten Kaigor Beyli. They flew away with him and took his two servants for good measure, and set us free. Now you have but one chance, and that a slender one, before they smite you and your men likewise. Mount and ride, flee to the south! Even now it may be too late. Ung Hoy is dead. Your men are without a leader."

For one flickering moment, Hume, watching the eyes of the yellow man, believed that all was won. Fear filled those eyes, and wild alarm. Then, in a flash, the eyes changed. What had caused that change Hume never knew, and did not stop to inquire, but gripped the pistol in his lap.

"Red dog, you lie!" snapped the officer angrily. "This is the work of men——"

His pistol flashed out, but Hume was ahead of him there. To the roar of the shot, the officer pitched backward out of sight. Patrick darted inside the *yurt* and stood glancing about, terror seizing him, his breast heaving to deep breaths.

"Lost!" he cried out. "Last chance lost—now they'll be on us!"

Indeed, a tumultuous uproar began to resound from the men camped all around the black *yurt*. Marie, startled, alarmed by the shot, came to her feet with fright upon her face, as Hume rose and touched her shoulder.

"Back," he said quietly. "Good-by, dear girl! Pat, get this rifle. Wake up, man!"

A clamor of shouts burst forth, ringing in the tent. Hume, shoving the paralyzed figure of Patrick aside, went to the entrance, determined to meet the rush of the crowd as it came. With a sob, Patrick flung himself at the other rifle and jerked it up.

Then, as Hume's hand flung open the tent flap, a shot sounded outside. Another followed it, and then an irregular volley. The tumult was drowned by a keener, shriller burst of yells; even Hume could detect the sharp difference in the voices, the rising exultancy that swept up and out and was punctuated by another volley of shots.

Outside he could see bursts of flame stabbing the darkness. A tremendous thudding of hoofs, a screaming of horses, rose above the shots and shouts. And now, black against the snow, a figure slid around the side of the *yurt* and uprose before him.

"Don't shoot, master!" cried the voice of Namki. "I have brought the riders from Zain."

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XII

THE morning sunlight glittered upon a world white with new-fallen snow, though around the tents that snow was stained red, as if to match the blood-red coats of the Mongol cavalry. A score of these remained in the camp; the others had whirled away on the heels of such bandits as had fled south. There were no prisoners.

Hume stood at the entrance of the black *yurt*, which had been made over to Marie's use, and talked with Namki and the local "god" of the Zain monastery, who had come with the troops. Patrick was off among the tents, seeking the gold and what was left of the wine. The local deity fingered the green jade seal of Jenghis Khan very gingerly, despite his fur mittens, as Hume told of Kaigor Beyli. To the Mongols it was very evident that the demon from the sacred mountain had reached out and smitten that traitorous prince.

Hume was not so certain that the demon had done it; yet he felt a humble conviction that some higher power had been at work in these things.

"But the Black Stone!" demanded the local incarnation of Buddha, eagerness flaming in his narrow eyes. "The Black Stone! Where is it? Where is that great treasure of the world?"

Hume shrugged.

"Lying around here somewhere. Namki, go and find it," he ordered; then turned.

The *yurt* entrance was open, and Marie stood there, blinded by the sun and the snow-gleam.

Namki tugged at the sash of the "god" and grinned.

"My master is bewitched, so leave him to his folly," said he, although not so loudly that Hume could overhear. "Come with me and we shall find the stone."

So they went, and the long scarlet coats glimmered against the trampled snow, and overhead a great bird circled with head drooped, peering down upon the feast that awaited the spoilers of the air.

THE CHINA CLIPPER

by Aaron Davis

A GHOST ship drives on the haunted trails:
Sing Johnny-O and let her go!
She's a lady ship by the way she sails:
Sing Johnny off to China.

The trade wind strums on the weather shrouds,
The white seas race astern;
She'll make Foochow like a drift of clouds
When Winter's on the turn.

By the London docks from Java Head,
Full half the world away,
She'll back her yards when the dawn is red,
Two hundred miles a day.

The scent of heathen merchandise,
The breath of the new Spring tea,
Ivory and silk and jade and rice
Are a perfumed memory.

A dream ship drives through the misty seas:
Sing Johnny don't forget her!
She's a lady, sir, and, if you please,
Sing Johnny off to China.
Sing Johnny-O and let her go!
Sing Johnny back from China!

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NOT A GENTLEMAN'S JOB

By Magda Leigh

CARSTAIRS was trudging down South Street, suit-case in hand. He had just been paid off and under ordinary circumstances would have taken a taxi, where engine-room and navigating department were a one-man affair, and enjoyed the pilotage of a city chauffeur. He had money aplenty for such luxury, but no mood for it. A taxi meant quick departure from South Street, and Carstairs, though he would not have acknowledged it to himself, was prolonging his stay in the vicinity of the docks as long as possible.

His gaze wavered as he caught sight of Blue Peter floating above a Ward Liner in a dock across the way. Into his eyes crept an expression of wistfulness, which he immediately routed.

"Sailing!" he muttered to himself. "More boobs in brass buttons and pretty white uniforms, with lady passengers for to see and admire! Oh, ——!"

He plodded on morosely.

Suddenly he brought up short. His gaze was fastened on a rusty freighter. She was as ugly a ship as any he had ever seen; small, bunched up amidship, awkward, ungainly.

"Holy mackerel!" Carstairs gasped. "Look what the cat brought in!"

He stood on the curb, totally lost in contemplation of the ship. After the graceful, rakish liner he had just left, this thing was crude, raw, terrifically gripping.

He felt a touch on his arm and looked down into the ugly face of a tawdry individual beside him. His hand automatically went into his pocket.

"What's the song this time?" he grinned good-naturedly. "Shipwrecked and lost all you had? Or just on the beach and broke?"

The red face of the man beside him flushed to even a deeper color.

"Who in —— you think you're speakin' to?" a raucous voice demanded furiously. "I seen you standin' here, gawkin' at my ship, and I think mebbe you're on the beach and wantin' a berth. I need a second mate. Need one —— bad. So I come up to you, and you——"

"Your ship?" Carstairs exploded. "That gargoyle over there?"

"Her name's *Balandra Head!*" the small man snapped. "And mine's Merriweather —Cap'n Merriweather!"

"*Balandra Head!* Some name for that! Where'd you get it?"

Again Carstairs grinned.

"Off'n a chart of Haiti. Our trade's with Haiti."

"Ouch! Don't snap like that!"

Carstairs' blue eyes twinkled.

"And Merriweather. That's a grand name, too. Is it honestly yours, little game-cock?"

The runty skipper crimsoned with fury.

"Looky here, mama's boy!" he bellowed. "I come up to you civil-like and ask if you want a second mate's berth on my ship, and you get smart and sass me. Why don't you speak up and say you wouldn't soil your lily-white fingers a-sailin' in a real ship, hmph? Why don't you 'fess up you're afraid of a he-man's job?"

Captain Merriweather's small red eyes

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flashed, and his pugnacious nose tilted insolently upward into Carstairs' face.

"Well, you see, it's like this," the latter drawled. "I've just quit going to sea. Wrote home to dad that I was sick of it and coming into the office."

"I knowed it! I knowed it! 'Papa's pet!" shrilled the skipper triumphantly. "Goin' home to be a gent'mun! Seafarin's too rough for you!"

"Too rough! ——!" Carstairs snorted. "Flunkies, stewardesses, manicure-girls! Wireless concerts, palm-rooms, bridge-parties! Might as well be in a bloomin' hotel!"

"They's no flunkies and palm-rooms on the *Balandra Head!* That's no gent'mun's job! 'Taint brass buttons you need on my ship! It's guts!"

There was an amazing note of pride in Merriweather's voice. Carstairs glanced across the way again. The *Balandra Head*, squatting absurdly at her dock, hunched up in the middle like an old woman with a cramp, seemed to eye him pathetically.

"How come you can't get a second? Where's the one you had?" he asked, suddenly interested.

Capt. Merriweather noted the change, and his eyes gleamed.

"Crago—he was—took sick last voyage. Buried at sea. Can't get any one else. All like you—gent'mun! Want White Fleet berths!"

"Like me?" Carstairs cursed softly. "I'll show you if they're like me! Come on and sign me on for a voyage, you little bantam! Hold on! You're not my boss yet, so I'll call you what I want!"

He turned back toward the sidewalk.

"I'll wire dad I've changed my mind. Then lead me to it! Guess one more voyage will help me swallow that —— desk job when I quit!"

CAPTAIN MERRIWEATHER'S eyes sparkled as he led his newly acquired second officer aboard his ship that afternoon. His manner toward Carstairs was purely insolent, but deep in his heart he was proud.

"Class!" he murmured to himself. "The real stuff! A White Fleet dude!"

Then maliciously:

"——! Wait until Faney gets after him! He'll sweat! He ain't rightly been to sea yet!"

He hailed a powerfully built, sullen-visaged man in shirt sleeves, who was lounging at the top of the gangway, smoking a vile pipe.

"Hey, Faney! This is our new second mate, Mr. Hugh Carstairs. Show him his quarters."

The hulk addressed as Faney eyed Carstairs witheringly.

"'S he drunk?" he demanded of the skipper.

Capt. Merriweather assumed an air of ludicrous dignity.

"No, he ain't drunk! You think I can't get a good man to sign on my ship sober? We'll clear out o' here tomorrow. All set now."

He swung away abruptly, leaving his two vastly differing mates face to face.

"Come on, you!" Faney growled. "If you're not drunk now, you'll soon wish you was!"

Carstairs made no reply. He stared quietly into the mate's blood-shot eyes, and a slow smile spread over his face. Faney's gaze shifted and he turned away, Hugh following at his heels.

Alone in his quarters a few minutes later, Carstairs glanced about him in disgust.

"The stinking little, vermin-infested hell-cat!" he muttered. "Whatever possessed me to sign on? Cooties and gas have nothing on this!"

His gaze swept the cramped room. It was unspeakably dirty, and it reeked of stale tobacco, stale booze—and worse. Carstairs started to put down his suit-case and changed his mind. He strode to the door and looked along the deck. There was no one in sight. He stepped over the high door-sill and dropped his suit-case at his feet. Then he shouted—

"Hey, mess!"

A dirty, scowling boy appeared from abaft the house and slouched sullenly along the alleyway.

"I'm mess. Whadda ya want?" he asked, eying Carstairs belligerently.

"I want you. I'm the new second mate, and before I use that stinking room vacated by the late Mr. Crago, I want it cleaned up."

"Your room's clean!" the boy flared. "I cleaned it m'self."

"Well, you made a rotten job of it! Do it again and do it better this time!"

The boy leered.

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"What's in it for me if I do?"

"Nothing!" Carstairs snapped. "But there'll be a —— of a lot in it for you if you don't!"

The mess-boy started to retort. Then he happened to look into Carstairs' eyes. Muttering under his breath, he stepped into the second mate's room.

"Turn everything out!" he heard at his back. "Everything, understand? And when it's stripped clean, you get a bucket of *suji* and wash down the bulkhead. Scrub the bunk as well as the deck. Give that mattress and settee cushion a dose of air and sunshine. If there's such things as disinfectant and bug powder on this blighted hooker, you fetch 'em and use 'em. Get me?"

The mess-boy eyed him from under lowering brows.

"Yes, I get you!"

He dragged at the mattress.

"Yes, sir, I get you!" he amended.

And as Carstairs turned away he added under his breath—

"I'll get you, all right, you stuck-up swell!"

Carstairs was leaning against the rail a little later when Capt. Merriweather approached, dressed in a disreputable old uniform.

"Whassis?" the skipper exploded. "Wot you doin' in them shore-clothes?"

Carstairs realized that it was not anger so much as fear that made the old man shout—fear that Carstairs might have changed his mind about joining the *Balandra Head*, articles or no articles.

The captain glared into the second mate's room.

"Wot in ——'s goin' on here?" he demanded.

Carstairs regarded him quizzically.

Then, repressing a smile, he answered in pseudo-indignation:

"That room of mine was a disgrace to your ship, sir! I had Mess turn to and clean it up. As soon as it's fit, I'll change my clothes."

"Papa's pet!" the skipper snorted.

But Carstairs caught the quick gleam of appreciation in the other's eyes.

"He's proud of the louse!" Hugh chuckled to himself. "As vain as a woman with a jewel. Oh, ——!"

"You, Mess!" Captain Merriweather thundered, turning to the sweating boy. "You get that room cleaned up! My ship ain't no cattle-pen! You learn to keep my officers' quarters decent. Un'erstand?"

Mess muttered a reply. The bawling-out made him hot, but he had heard the Skipper call the new second "papa's pet," and he hugged the name to himself, determined to spread it among the crew.

"Papa's pet!" The crew of the *Balandra Head* would just love this spotless disliker of dirt! Mess' scrubbing was carried on with vigor. This voyage was going to be sport! They hadn't had any for a long time. ——, wot they'd do to this Mr. Carstairs on the way to Haiti!

CARSTAIRS, after a few days at sea, began to wonder if he were not living through some long, hideous nightmare. The *Balandra Head* had an amazing capacity for rolling. She seemed to seize upon the slightest excuse to roll, and the least head-sea sent her pitching, viciously.

The ship, however, was the least of his troubles. The human element aboard her —Carstairs considered it inhuman—was what got under his skin. Faney started drinking as soon as they were out of sight of land. He drank persistently, determinedly—a man who had endured a long drought!

At first Faney managed to stand his watches during the daytime, but Captain Merriweather, whining one moment and cursing the next, confided to Carstairs that he was afraid to trust the mate on the bridge, at night. His watch would be split. He, the skipper, would stand half; Carstairs would have to stand the other half.

"He ain't bad when he's sober," Merriweather wheedled. "And his booze won't hold out for long."

"Why don't you take it away from him?" Carstairs demanded.

"Wot? You don't know him! Faney's a hellion! Every man on my ship knows enough to keep out from under his feet! He's a good seaman, though, and I ain't lookin' for no trouble."

The skipper mopped his face as he spoke.

"You ain't used to doin' without your beauty sleep, are you, papa's pet?" he added with a sneer.

"I'm used to four hour watches," Carstairs replied hotly, "and to discipline and a decent ship!"

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"Decent ship? Decent ship? Ain't mine decent?"

Carstairs wondered if the old man were going to cry. His face was puckered like a baby's, and there were tears in his voice.

"I b'lieve you'd like to see her sink!" Merriweather accused him. "I b'lieve you'd stand by and let 'er go!"

"I'd take off my hat to her if she had the grace to bury herself out of sight in the deepest part of the sea!" Carstairs retorted.

"There! I knowed it!"

This time Carstairs was sure the old man would burst into tears. "You—you—gent'-mun!"

The skipper mopped his eyes. Hugh couldn't say whether he mopped perspiration or tears, but in order to end the scene he turned away and left the old man to his lamentations.

So a few days had passed, with Faney making a huge bluff of standing watches in broad daylight, and Carstairs and Merriweather doing double duty at night. It was beginning to tell on Carstairs. The physical strain, however, was nothing compared to the mental distress. The crew, the sort of crew one would find on such an atrocity as the *Balandra Head*, had rejoiced at the advent of the new second mate. Here was sport! A dude! And when mess spread the good word of the skipper calling Hugh papa's pet their joy was full.

Carstairs, always immaculate, received the contents of a bucket of *suji* over his shoulders early one morning as he was walking to the bridge ladder. The bucket, empty, lay on the deck outside the chartroom when Carstairs sprang up the ladder, but no one was in sight.

Another time a hose was "accidentally" played on him, when the men were cleaning down the deck. This was the sort of thing he had to endure time and again. Carstairs felt of his muscles and decided he needed to give them more attention.

THE *Balandra Head* was making her cumbersome way down the latitudes. She was nearing Haiti, and the waters were dotted by reefs, shoals, menacing banks. Carstairs' lips straightened into a grim line as he thought of the hours ahead. Unless Faney's booze gave out that worthy would be worse than useless. A sober man had to keep his mind on his job now, and his eyes clear. It would mean watch and watch for the skipper and Carstairs.

Hugh was in his broiling room, changing his clothes. The heat, the eternal stench, the combination of nerve-wracking petty annoyances that made up life on the *Balandra Head*, were telling on him. Now and again his head swam and then dropped forward in exhaustion on his breast. It was Faney's watch upon the bridge, and Captain Merriweather was somewhere about the deck. Carstairs dropped upon his bunk, half-dressed, to snatch a much needed sleep.

But even as he relaxed, he seemed to hear the old man's sarcastic "papa's pet!" He struggled upright and climbed out upon the deck again, swaying dizzily as he forced off his exhaustion.

"If he can stand it, I guess I can!" he muttered to himself. "The —— little game-cock!"

He staggered out along the deck and looked long upon the surrounding sea.

"——! What a life!" he breathed as he was swept by the vast solitude, the isolation. "I've had enough! A desk job for me after this!"

He flushed, as he remembered Merriweather's remark about "a gent'mun's job." —— the sea, anyway!

A sudden rage flamed in Hugh's heart. Faney! Because he was big and a bully, Merriweather feared him. And because he feared him, he permitted him to drink his fill, even though his condition meant double work for others. Hugh wondered if the late second mate had endured—and then objected!

Hugh drew himself erect. It made him dizzy to do it, and he realized he was groggy with fever. But he had work to do. He lurched with magnificent dignity to the mate's room, stepped over the high sill and disappeared within.

A half hour later Carstairs, his teeth chattering in a sudden chill, knocked gently at the skipper's door. There was no reply, so Hugh poked his head inquiringly inside. The skipper was sitting in a ludicrous position, his head lolling with each roll of the ship—fast asleep.

Hugh's eyes softened.

"Poor, game, little runt!" he whispered to himself. "Done up, but too sporting to turn in. Let him sleep! Guess I can manage without him."

He made his way heavily up to the bridge.

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Faney was not in sight. Carstairs strode to the pilot-house. As he entered, the man at the wheel straightened with a quick jerk. Carstairs shot a glance at him. Plainly the man had been asleep. Carstairs strangled an oath and looked down upon Faney, who was in deep slumber, lying grotesquely curved in a half-moon behind the wheelman.

"How long has Mr. Faney been asleep?" Carstairs snarled.

"How'd I know?" the helmsman leered. "That's a compass I'm lookin' at, not a clock!"

Carstairs' fist clenched in a sudden fury. Then he gripped himself. This was no time for a fight. He looked over the man's shoulder.

"Bring the ship back on her course!" he said softly. "And the next time you open your mouth to me, I'll smash it unless it's civil!"

He bent down and shook Faney.

"Here, you! Get to —— off the bridge! I'll stand your watch!"

Faney's only reply was a grunt. Again Carstairs shook him, this time more forcefully, as he himself shook beneath a sudden chill. Faney's eyes opened, and he looked stupidly about him.

"Get below!" Carstairs urged through chattering teeth. "I'll stand your watch."

Faney mumbled an unintelligible reply, but when he felt Carstairs' strong hands beneath his arm-pits he struggled to his feet.

He stared dully at the second mate a moment. Then he laughed shortly.

"Papa wouldn't know you now, pet!" he derided. "Forget to shave your pretty face this mornin'?"

"Shave? ——! I'll have time to shave when you get sober!" Carstairs grunted disgustedly.

"You'll grow a sweet beard then!" Faney muttered, making his unsteady way out upon the bridge.

"I'm not so sure of that!" Carstairs answered quietly.

Then he turned again to the compass.

"See that you keep her on her course, Karlsen. When we get the noon position we'll find just how far off you went during the mate's watch."

But noon found the sky overcast, and Carstairs, burning with fever, stood cursing at the rail. There the Old Man found him when he came on the bridge at eight bells.

Captain Merriweather glanced about.

"Where's Faney?" he demanded belligerently.

"I found him asleep and sent him below." Carstairs answered thickly.

"Asleep? When? How long?"

The old man's eyes darted hastily over the horizon.

Carstairs nodded somberly.

"The helmsman was asleep, too. We were off our course. —— knows just where we are—and no sun now!"

Captain Merriweather opened his mouth to speak, then snapped it shut again. Finally he turned and looked at Carstairs closely.

"You had any sleep?" he asked.

"No, sir. I—I seemed to have a hunch I was needed up here."

"Why didn't you call me? It wasn't your watch."

Carstairs turned leaden eyes on the little skipper and peered at him intently.

"It wasn't yours either, sir!" he answered. "You needed that sleep."

"Sleep! How d'you know I been asleep?"

The words were snapped out with Merriweather's usual animosity, but had Hugh's vision been clear, he might have seen the passing flush of surprize and gratitude that swept the old man's eyes.

"I went to speak to you, but saw you were sleeping, so I came above."

"What'd you want?"

Carstairs stiffened perceptibly.

"I wanted to report to you that I had found Faney's hooch and that I had sent most of it overboard!" he answered defiantly.

For a moment the old man's face purpled and his eyes seemed to flash fire. Then it changed to such a wobegone expression that Carstairs laughed hysterically.

"Laugh, you fool!" the skipper shrieked. "Now you've done it! I told you Faney was a terror when he got goin', and you've taken his hooch away! There ain't a man aboard won't side with him! He'll——"

"There's one man aboard won't side with him!" Hugh interrupted impatiently. "If he starts anything I'll knock seven bells out of him!"

Merriweather peered up at him. Then he drew a deep breath.

"You can go below now and turn in. You need sleep. And lock your door, see? It'll be hotter'n —— in your room, but I'm

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not wantin' any more fatal accidents aboard my ship!"

"Fatal accidents?" Hugh paused. "Cargo's sickness was brought on by Faney, then, I take it?"

"Get below!" Merriweather bellowed. "Guess I'm still master, ain't I?"

Carstairs managed a crooked grin and a wabbly salute, and staggered off to obey. Sleep? He felt as if he could sleep forever. But not with his door closed. Faney seemed less terrible than the heat!

IT SEEMED to Carstairs that he has just closed his eyes when he felt first a sensation akin to that caused by a severe earthquake, and then something closer and more tangible. He sat bolt upright and gazed about him.

Faney, unkempt, dirty, reeking, stood swaying just inside the doorway. There was a savage look in the big brute's face.

"Where's my liquor?" he demanded hoarsely of Carstairs. "—— you, where's my liquor?"

Hugh, dropping lightly to his feet, stood for a moment gaining his equilibrium. He felt queer. Something about the ship felt queer. There was a strange, heavy feel——

"You've had enough booze," he answered finally when his vision had cleared a bit. "And as I had fever I helped myself to some and threw the rest overboard."

He paused and waited, fully expecting Faney to leap at him. But the big mate merely stared at him a moment unbelievingly.

"You didn't!" Faney managed to gasp. "You wouldn't of dared, papa's pet!"

"I've stopped being papa's pet, Mr. Faney! The sooner you wake up and realize that, the better."

Hugh stepped nearer the other man. There was nothing hostile in his attitude. He stood at ease, his arms hanging idle at his sides. But in his eyes was a promise of quick death.

Faney was bewildered. He had awakened from his drunken sleep with a terrible thirst, and he had been unable to find his hooch—two bottles of it which he had painstakingly hidden where he thought no one could find them. He had immediately called the mess-boy upon discovering his loss, and that lad, realizing that at last his chance to "get" the second mate had arrived, told Faney of having seen "Mr." Carstairs coming out of the mate's room with something hidden in a towel.

Faney's fist clenched. But as he was about to make a move toward Carstairs his befuddled mind seemed to grasp that there was something queer about the *Balandra Head*. He paused and looked inquiringly at Hugh. They stood, the one stupid with drink, the other hazy with fever, listening.

"We're aground!" Carstairs finally exclaimed.

He sprang to the door and out upon the deck, Faney stumbling at his heels.

There was a sound of much shouting for'ard. Carstairs with a supreme effort pulled himself together.

"—— you!" he cried. "This is due to your nap this morning!"

He sensed, rather than saw, Faney's fist swinging toward him, and ducked. Then with all his strength he planted his own fist against the big mate's jaw.

"We kept in shape with a medicine ball on my old ship!" he panted. "We didn't have the privilege of beating each other up!"

Stepping over Faney's recumbent form, Hugh raced forward and up to the bridge.

He found Captain Merriweather at the engine-room telegraph, apoplectic of face and "crying mad."

"Who in ——'s been navigatin' my ship?" the old man shrilled. "We're somewheres where we hadn't oughta be! What I wanta know is——"

Carstairs cursed softly.

"Don't weep now!" he said bitterly. "The —— old pile of junk! How hard on are we, I wonder?"

A confusion of voices for'ard came as if in reply. The ship shuddered as once again Captain Merriweather yanked the engine-room telegraph and the propeller was again set to thrashing, astern.

Suddenly there was a sensation of buoyancy beneath the *Balandra Head*. She rolled.

"She's off!" came the shout from the men for'ard.

Merriweather glared down at them, jerked the telegraph to "stop," then turned to Carstairs.

"I'll keep a man out with the lead, and we'll proceed at half-speed," he said with pompous dignity.

"Which way? Down?" Hugh growled.

Merriweather glared at him a moment.

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"Go below and have Chips sound the wells!" he snapped. "If we've got any bottom in her after that, I'm a landlubber."

Hugh turned to obey, but staggered and clutched the rail for support.

"Oh, ——'s fire!" the skipper wailed. "*You* drunk, too?"

"No—not drunk; fever! Your ——, rotten little pest-hole of a ship! Enough to kill any decent man!" Hugh gasped.

Merriweather glared at him.

"Man! Man?" he snorted. "I told you this was no gentleman's job, you—you——"

Hugh flung away. He managed to get down the ladder without falling, and sped to his room.

"Thank God for Faney's hooch!" he muttered between chattering teeth as he closed the door behind him.

THREE facts were realized by every man on the *Balandra Head*. One was that the ship was making water. A second was that as night approached, the barometer promised some sort of weather. The third was that the second mate, fighting chills with Faney's hooch, and then half-burning with fever, might be said to be running amuck.

Captain Merriweather, on the bridge, paced bewilderedly from rail to rail.

"Told me to get to —— on to the bridge and attend to the navigatin'!" he gasped to himself. "Standin' it single-handed, below—that crowd yammerin' to man the boats and desert my ship before she fills and sinks! Papa's pet! Whew!"

The skipper brushed his shirt sleeve over his sweating face.

"Never would ha' guessed it, —— if I would!" he marveled, his small, red eyes sparkling.

Suddenly they clouded.

"If they touch him, I'll shoot the whole boilin' of them to glory!"

He squinted aft, but at first saw no signs of life along the main deck.

Yet even as he peered through the murk that was steadily enveloping the crawling steamer, a strange creature staggered from the engineer's alleyway. The man was bleeding from a dozen different places, and he sobbed out terrible curses as he clawed his way up the ladder.

Merriweather danced frenziedly at the top, his face purpling, his beady eyes flashing.

"Now, wot in ——'s *this?*" he shrieked excitedly. "Wot's goin' on aboard my ship?"

The gory creature before him raised a battered face.

"Faney!" Merriweather choked.

He became suddenly calm and surveyed the wreck with interest.

"Papa's pet!" he finally exploded. "He *told* me he'd knock seven bells out o' you, you big stiff!"

"Seven?"

Faney spoke through missing teeth and distorted lips.

"He didn't stop at seven—he knocked out all eight!"

A great light flooded the little skipper's eyes.

"Did he use a holystone?" he snorted.

Faney shook his head painfully.

"Fists!" he answered simply. "He's —— let loose!"

Merriweather stared.

"I believe you're sober!" he croaked.

Faney nodded dizzily. "Any one would be! Bandage me up!" he ordered hoarsely. "I can't see for this —— blood!"

"Bandage nothin'!" Merriweather howled. "You touch that boy and I'll shoot another eight bells outa you!"

"Touch him? I'd as soon touch a thousand mad rattlers!" Faney groaned. "I'm sober! Fix me up. You need me."

The skipper eyed him keenly. "Where's this wildcat of ourn right now?" he demanded suspiciously.

Faney groaned.

"Last I seen, he was doin' unto others wot he done unto me! I think he must 'a' finished the deck department by this time and gone below to preach the gospel to the black gang. Seems they was arguin' about remainin' below."

"Pumps going?" Merriweather questioned.

Faney looked at him through blackened, swollen eyes. "If Mr. Carstairs is alive they're goin'!"

Merriweather caught Faney by the elbow as he swayed, and guided him toward the chartroom.

"'Mister' is right!" the skipper agreed solemnly.

NIGHT and the tail-end of a West Indian hurricane descended simultaneously upon the heaving *Balandra Head*. Upon the bridge a lone figure kept crucifying vigil. Now and again the

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figure raised its head to the gale and cursed into the darkness.

On the chartroom floor, where he had fallen, Faney lay sleeping, his head a grotesque arabesque of plaster and bandages.

Carstairs did not appear, but news of him came from below in the shape of two more battered, bleeding creatures who also spoke of him as "mister."

"We was comin' up the ladder—he ain't the chief!"

Merriweather recognized the misshapen face before him as that of the first assistant engineer.

"Tell it so it makes meanin'!" the skipper barked. "Why comin' up the ladder?"

"The —— ship's sinkin'!" the other wreck croaked. "We ain't goin' to stay down there and drown."

Merriweather swallowed hard.

"So you come up, eh? And met Mr. Carstairs? And he beat you like the curs you are, eh?"

The old man's breath whistled.

"I got *one* man on my ship, ain't I? Wot's he doin' now?"

The two men before him exchanged glances. Then one answered sullenly:

"He's got the chief down there, runnin' the engines—he's got a gun—he's busted up a couple of stokers. He's gone bugs!"

"Bugs? Bugs?" Merriweather exclaimed. "Get to —— outa my sight! I'll attend to you tomorrow!"

All night the *Balandra Head* drove crazily through the storm, her pumps going, her engines throbbing slowly and steadily.

Below, men cursed—but softly, under their breaths—at the flaming-eyed young madman who had beaten, cowed, conquered them. He had worked swiftly, relentlessly, and he seemed able to endure without sleep, without relief. When the watch below insisted upon being relieved he laughed at them.

"When the other watch reports!" he jeered. "Think I'm going to let you out when they're afraid to come down? —— your yellow hearts!"

The chief, a dour, morose creature, tried to argue.

"Looka here, Mr. Carstairs! You know the —— hooker's fillin'. She'll open up wide with this poundin'. We ain't lookin' for quick death. Wot's the old tub to you anyway? She's rotten, and she stinks. I've heard you say so yourself!"

"It's the people aboard her!" Carstairs retorted insolently. "The ship's all right!"

"Well, we ain't goin' to stick down here and drown!" the chief repeated sullenly.

"You'll stick—or go to —— along the shortest road you ever saw!" Carstairs answered lightly, raising his gun.

They stuck. They stuck—not so much because of the gun, as because of the look in Carstairs' eyes.

CAPTAIN MERRIWEATHER, pausing on his way across the bridge, glanced into the pilot-house. He saw Faney standing by the helmsman. Merriweather entered.

"You sober enough to take the bridge?" he asked, looking searchingly into the mate's eyes.

"Yes, I'm sober. But if you're worrying about papa's pet, I wouldn't!"

Faney's hand touched his bandaged head gently.

Captain Merriweather's gaze shifted.

"You stay awake this time!" he snapped.

He gave Faney a word or two of instructions. Then he pulled the collar of his oilskins up about his chin, pushed his sou'wester down over his forehead and went out again into the wild night.

The *Balandra Head* staggered dizzily over seas that hissed away from under her stern. She pitched crazily into the ensuing troughs, her stern rising as if to follow the bow in one fatal downward plunge—her propeller racing until throttled down. The wind beat against the house, screaming through the rigging and roaring down the alleys.

Captain Merriweather gave little heed to the elements. That they tried to hold him, to down him, to best him, he had no doubt. He swung wildly outward as he descended the ladder, and only his firm grasp on the man-rope saved him.

A viscious sea, thundering down upon the *Balandra Head*, met the skipper as he reached the main deck. He sensed its onrush and clung tenaciously to the handrail, his body pressed close to the house. Out of the mad dark, the waters flung themselves at him, strangled and trampled him, and sucked at his feet as the ship careened to a new onslaught, and they boiled overboard again.

Merriweather, jaw set and every muscle taut, made a rush for the engineer's alleyway. His course was zigzag, but he kept

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his feet. The distance from bridge ladder to the shelter of the alleyway was actually but a few steps, but with a heaving deck, a howling gale, and possibly another sea at the very rail, rearing perilously and threatening to crash down upon him, it seemed a long way to battle.

When he stepped inside the door at the top of the engine-room ladder, he was trembling. He paused for a moment to get his breath. A wave of sickening, oily heat rose at him and turned him sick.

"And *he's* been down there in this, with fever, all night!" he muttered. "Papa's pet!"

Below, Hugh was beginning to sway where he clung to a lower step of the iron ladder. He had long since passed the stage where he could stand. He now half-sat, one hand steadying him on the ladder, the other clutching his revolver. He recalled the words that had so stirred him during the Great War—

"They shall not pass!"

He smiled crookedly as he thought of them in connection with the brutes who were shoveling coal, beyond. One of them had come scouting, but had gone back to report that "that hellion" was still there.

Carstairs gazed dazedly about him. This was not his element—this strange domain of flying wheels and rods and plunging crossheads. He belonged on the bridge, in the air where a man could breathe. He lifted his hand to his parched throat suddenly. About him everything blurred. Then quick blackness smote him—he was falling—his head struck something.

The chief saw him slide down the ladder to the engine-room floor. He lifted his voice in a victorious shout. There was a clatter of shovels to the deck—a rush of sweating, grimy figures—and then a pause.

Captain Merriweather took deliberate aim at the chief.

"Get back!" he roared, stepping carefully down the ladder. "I'm in a shootin' mood! If that boy's hurt, I'm goin' to kill—un'erstand?"

He came on down, and the black gang, getting a look at his face, backed into the fire-room and hopelessly resumed the agony of feeding the fires.

CARSTAIRS opened his eyes. His head felt as if it had been beaten with a slice bar, and his body lay limp and exhausted.

"Better?"

Hugh managed to turn so as to glimpse the speaker. It was Faney, his face a fantastic net-work of strips of adhesive plaster.

"I'm—all—right!" Hugh answered thickly. "Those pumps stopped? I don't hear 'em!"

Faney nodded.

"Sure they're stopped. Here! You lie still, young feller! The *Balandra Head's* safe in port—even if it's not the port we were headin' for, thanks to my nap—and undergoin' temporary repairs. You didn't suppose we'd quit just because *you* went down and out, did you?"

There was a queer note of wistfulness in Faney's voice, and it puzzled Hugh.

"How long have I been out?" he questioned dazedly.

"Oh, a coupla days! You're boardin' out in Port Plata, right now. I'm—" Faney's patches of face grew red—"I'm your nurse."

Carstairs' eyes closed wearily. What a sweet mess! Days of humiliation and disgust on the stinking ship; nights of racking double duty; Faney, drunk; the *Balandra Head* off her course—scraping over a shoal—leaking——

"What happened?" he asked finally.

"Skipper went down to see how you were comin'—found you unconscious. Them heathen was just goin' to rush the ladder. He sent 'em back!"

Carstairs stared at him. "Who navigated the ship while the skipper was below?"

Faney's eyes dropped.

"I did."

Suddenly he looked straight at Carstairs.

"You beat some guts into me, I guess. I never was beat before."

Hugh smiled weakly.

"Not bearing me any grudge, are you?" he asked.

"——, no!"

Faney flushed like a woman.

There was an awkward silence for a moment. Then Hugh asked—

"Where's that cocky little skipper?"

"Comin', right now!" Faney replied.

His tone was such that Carstairs opened wondering eyes to stare at him. He saw Faney rise to his feet and, as Captain Merriweather entered the room, salute.

"Mr. Carstairs is awake!" the mate announced gently.

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Hugh looked up into the skipper's face. It was deeply lined, carved anew by the hours he had endured without rest, without cessation of anxiety. His eyes were hollow, and all the belligerency was gone out of them.

"Well, Mr. Carstairs! I been down to the dock, arrangin' for your passage home. They's a Clyde boat due in a week."

He paused.

"You'll be well enough to leave by then," he added dismally.

"How about the *Balandra Head?*" Hugh asked.

"Her?"

A quick light flashed into the old man's eyes.

"Oh, she'll be ready for sea again—we're going to take her to Porto Rico to dry-dock her."

"How about a crew?"

"Got 'em. My bunch o' hellions has beat it mostly, but I managed to piece out with the remains of two other shipwrecked crews," Merriweather replied.

"Nice lot of ruffians, I'll say!" Faney growled.

"Yeh! You'll have your hands full, Mr. Mate!" the skipper sighed.

Carstairs looked from one to the other, from the little, ugly skipper to the big, battered mate. Then he looked ahead into the hours of weariness, anxiety, danger, hellishness, that these two would soon be facing. He looked back and pictured the *Balandra Head*, squat, misshapen, ludicrous, battling her way through dark and storm, leaking, her pumps holding death in check. She had come through—the dirty, rotten little tramp! She had made port!

And Faney. He'd come through, too.

Merriweather? Carstairs found a mist over his eyes as he regarded the little skipper.

"You cancel that passage on the Clyde boat!" Hugh commanded gruffly. "I'm no —— passenger! I'm second mate of the *Balandra Head!*" he announced proudly.

As the old man's wondering gaze was turned upon him, Carstairs grinned.

"I'm not going home to papa yet!" he exclaimed airily. "I'm not fit for a gentleman's job any more!"

Then he suddenly sobered.

"You're a whole man, skipper!" he breathed. "And —— it, what's good enough for the likes o' you is good enough for the likes o' me! I'm staying on if you want me."

"If I *want* you!"

Merriweather choked, his face suddenly illuminated by the first smile Hugh had seen on it.

"*Son!*"

TIMID BUFFALOES

by Hugh Pendexter

WHEN Alexander Henry was on the Red River of the North, in the employ of the North West Fur company, in 1800, he saw great herds of buffalo cows moving southward.

It was in November and the migration had commenced. The cows traveled at full speed until they came to the trail left by Henry and some of his men, made when they had visited a salt pit. Coming to a plunging halt, the cows sniffed at the ground, then wheeled and made off for the hills.

Henry says he has seen an immense herd come to a halt at sight of the trail left by one man, indulging in much pawing and bellowing as it ranged along the trail seeking an opening. At last, when one became courageous enough to leap over the trail, the others would follow.

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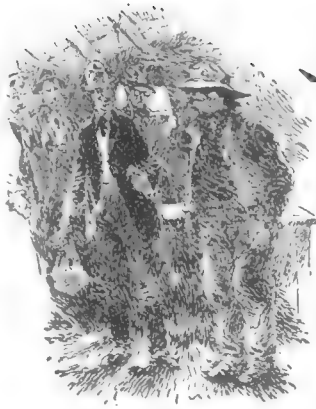

SKOOKUM JIM AND THE GOLDEN RULE

by John Joseph

Author of "The Smilin' Kid," "The Ethics of a Fighter," etc.

IT WAS nine o'clock on a frosty October evening, when "Skookum" Jim slipped noiselessly into the Silver Dollar Barroom and made his soft-footed way to the table where Deputy Sheriff Claude Barton sat playing poker with a party of friends.

"Short Joe, him dead!" said the old Indian, shortly, touching Barton lightly on the shoulder.

The deputy glanced up, quickly, then sprang to his feet and ran his eyes sharply over the red man. The neck of a whisky-bottle peeped from Skookum Jim's side coat-pocket; quite clearly he was rather more than half-drunk.

"Joe dead?" exclaimed Barton. "How's that, Jim? Where and how? Tell us about it."

"Him dead in cabin," replied Jim. "Me run trap-line—stop see Joe. Me fin' Joe dead. Somebody shoot Joe—blow brains off. Me feel ver' bad! Joe, be my frien'! You come—me show—Joe, he dead."

"You sure he's dead, Skookum?" inquired Barton. "You look see?"

"Sure, me look see. Him lay down on face—on floor—somebody shoot um Joe in head. Shoot behind—through window. Joe, he sure dead!"

Skookum Jim was one of those rare, inscrutable red men who, for reasons wholly beyond the ken of their white brothers, live alone and never mix in any way with others of their tribe. He lived in a crude log-cabin at the base of Diablo Mountain, a stupendous pile of gray granite that reared its crest ten thousand feet into the clouds some ten miles east of the frontier town of Redmont. For thirty-odd years he had put out a trap-line there during the months when the fur was prime, and at other times he worked at odd jobs on the far-scattered ranches. At times he wandered much, stopping here and there for a meal with one of his numerous rancher friends. He was everywhere welcome, for he was clean and good-humored and always willing to work, splitting wood and carrying water and helping the men with their chores; and the worst that any one had ever said of him was that he sometimes got peaceably drunk.

"Shorty" Joe had been Skookum's nearest neighbor, and their friendship had existed unbroken for a third of a century. Joe lived on the opposite side of Diablo Mountain, and the two often visited back and forth when the lack of companionship oppressed them. Joe had been a wizard at "pocket-hunting," and many marvelous tales were told of the wonderful "strikes" he had made.

He had often visited the town, and his queer little figure—clothes three sizes too large, sleeves and trousers rolled up, and immense fur cap that he had never been

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known to take from his head—was well-known to everybody. He had been a peace-loving man, and avoided trouble in a way that aroused the good-natured contempt of the gun-toting, hard-riding natives, but he gave money freely to the down-and-outer and to children about the street; he always had a cheerful "Howdy, man" for every one, and so was able to count every man his friend.

He always had money and, while it was known that he gave away a great deal, it was common talk that a large part of his many rich strikes lay buried somewhere in the hills, and now it appeared that this persistent gossip had led at last to Joe's undoing.

Deputy Sheriff Claude Barton was a tall, rather slim young man of twenty-five; there was a hint of good humor in his eyes, his speech was slow and pleasant, he smiled easily. Altogether he appeared to be a shrewd, competent youngster; a man well able to take care of himself in any kind of company. He carried two guns, and it was pretty well understood that he knew how to use them.

Claude's father, "Old Tex" Barton, had been sheriff for a dozen years, but of late he had been sticking pretty close to his little foot-hills cattle-ranch, and had practically turned the office over to his son; which seemed natural enough since Tex was growing old and had a bad hip due to a bullet recently collected in battle with a gang of rustlers. He was of the old, straight-shooting type of frontiersmen, and it was his proud boast that never in his twelve years of service had a prisoner escaped him, and that never yet had he put up his hands at the command of an enemy.

THE young deputy eyed Skookum Jim sharply when he had concluded his brief account of what he had seen.

"Shot from behind—through the window, eh?" he said musingly, caressing his chin. "It's a dirty rotten job! Old Joe never harmed any man on earth. It's a —— of a note! When a harmless old man like that gets shot down like a —— dog—with never a chance for his life! Somebody after Joe's dust, I reckon. What do you know about it, Skookum? Did Joe have a lot of gold-dust around some place?"

"Joe have sometime plenty dust," replied Skookum. "All time hide um dust—me no savvy 'bout that."

"Joe was robbed as well as murdered—there's no doubt about that," said Barton. "And now it's up me and Joe's friends to find the cur that done it. But—it's no use goin' out there tonight; we'd be dead sure to bungle things up—workin' in the dark. I'll deputize some of Joe's friends, tonight, and we'll start at daylight."

The deputy paused to eye Skookum Jim speculatively for a moment, then glanced around at the crowd.

"I'll only need three-four men," he drawled softly, "and I'm thinkin' the best men to take will be Shorty Joe's friends. How about you, Davis? Anything holding you?"

"Hardpan" Davis, hardly old-timer, veteran prospector and close friend of Shorty Joe's, hitched his gun around and spat out a mouth-filling oath.

"Not a thing to stop me, sher'ff!" he boomed. "I reckon old Joe's been butchered by somebody—some rotten cur that slipped up and plugged him from behind his back! And when we get our claws on the kiotey that done it, I'll be thar to drag on the rope without waitin' for any fool law-trial! We didn't used to be so all-fired pe'ticular—'fore the country got all cluttered up with perfumery dudes from way down East! Sure, I'll go."

The young deputy smiled, caressed his chin, glanced around at the crowd again.

"How about you, Pence?" he presently asked. "You knew old Joe pretty well; want to go along?"

Dave Pence, the lanky young cow-puncher addressed, looked the deputy straight in the eye.

"Nothin' ever holdin' me, Claude," he replied promptly. "Old Joe was as white a man as ever lived, and I'm like old Hardpan, here—I can drag on a rope with the next man, I reckon. I'm with you—any kind of a game!"

"There won't be any rough stuff with a rope," said Barton quietly. "That kind of a game don't go with me, understand? That makes two," he added, "and Skookum makes three. One more will be enough. Where's Georgie Wimple?"

The crowd set up a laugh, and all eyes were turned to a slender youth who stood lounging against the bar, writing rapidly in a big note-book.

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The young man pulled his glasses a little lower on his nose and glanced over them at the crowd; the laughter broke out afresh, for Georgie Wimple, new tenderfoot "reporter" for the Redmont *Weekly Messenger*, was looked upon by these tempestuous pioneers as a huge joke all the way around.

Particularly, George's note-book was a joke. He scribbled in it with the utmost enthusiasm, upon every possible occasion, and some of the wags were predicting that Georgie's expense for lead-pencils would soon drive the *Messenger* on the rocks. Georgie didn't understand, but he managed a sickly grin.

"How about it?" Barton asked. "Want to join us? You can sure get a whole note-book full of stuff for the *Messenger;* there'll likely be some hard ridin', and maybe some smoke. What say?"

"I'd be very glad to go," replied Georgie. "I've got a horse of my own now, and I've been taking riding-lessons—riding two or three miles every day. I feel sure that I shall not be a handicap, even if I am of no particular use. Shall I bring along a weapon of some sort?"

The crowd roared, once more, but Georgie's knowledge as to what it was all about was strictly a minus quantity. He stared around, grinning and chewing his pencil; the merriment increased and was only stilled when Barton clapped his hands for order.

The deputy now lined up his men and swore them in as deputy sheriffs.

"Get your breakfast early," he ordered when the brief ceremony had been concluded, "and meet me at the office at daylight. We start as soon as we can see."

AT NINE o'clock on the following morning the deputy's party, with a led horse to carry the body, arrived at Shorty Joe's cabin. They dismounted and tied their horses to small trees; then Barton led the way into the cabin. They found the body lying face down, beside the table, as Skookum Jim had stated. The position of the body, the open window, the untouched food on the table—all indicated that Shorty Joe had been shot through the window as he sat down to his evening meal.

Georgie got out his note-book and pencil; Barton turned the body over and pulled the cap from the head that no one had ever before seen uncovered.

"My ——!" the deputy gasped, shrinking back, as two long braids of gray hair tumbled from beneath the cap. "It's a woman! If father knew this he'd go——"

Barton suddenly muzzled his tongue and cast a quick glance around. It was a singular remark, under the circumstances; plainly the deputy was badly shaken; the others stared. Barton recovered his poise, with an effort, and glanced again at the corpse. The forehead and temples seemed almost snow-white in contrast with the sun-tanned face. The bullet had entered at the base of the skull and in passing out had completely destroyed the right eye. The effect was ghastly beyond description; the deputy drew back trembling.

"——!" he said huskily. "Think of shooting down a gray old woman—like that!

"It's sure ——, butcherin' an old woman—like she was no more than a dog!" said Hardpan Davis grimly. "But man or woman, Shorty Joe was my friend, and by ——, men, somebody's got to pay for it, if it takes me the rest of my life to find him!"

Dave Pence and Georgie stood staring, speechless with the horror of it all; Skookum Jim, silent and grim, gazed steadily at the body; the young deputy, suddenly becoming aware of the cap in his hand, shuddered and hastily dropped it to the floor. Skookum Jim picked it up.

"Ver' bad!" he said, softly. "No-good look um!"

Then he placed the cap reverently over the face of his dead friend.

The men gradually recovered their composure, and presently began a careful examination of the cabin. There was nothing to indicate that anything had been disturbed, and the only evidence they were able to find, was two bullets, imbedded in the wall opposite the window. One had struck on a level with the lower edge of the window, and had scarcely buried itself in the log. The other, a foot higher up, had penetrated much deeper.

They dug them out with pocket-knives and were able to say positively that they were .44 bullets, and it seemed reasonable to suppose that both had been fired from the same gun; from which it was of course inferred that the first shot had missed.

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Skookum Jim had passed outside while the others were digging the bullets out; he now appeared at the door and called the deputy out. The others followed and Jim led the way to Shorty Joe's spring; which proved to be a hole some two feet wide and two feet deep, blasted out of the solid granite and level full of water.

Skookum Jim pointed to a large flat stone lying beside the spring.

"Me think so this rock b'long bottom this spring," he said earnestly. "Me think so Joe he keep plenty bag dust bottom this spring. Cover um up with rock, mebby so nobody look see. What you think?"

Barton dropped to his knees and examined the flat stone, then turned his attention to the spring. Georgie scribbled rapidly in his note-book.

The deputy had now completely recovered his usual poise.

"I believe you're right," he conceded, glancing up at Skookum Jim. "There's an offset down there, and this stone will just about fit in on the top of it. That would leave room below for a big cache of dust; and it sure is one fancy little scheme for hidin' the stuff!

Barton picked up the stone and slipped it into place in the spring.

"Fits like a glove," he declared. "Nobody would ever think of looking under that stone—never in a thousand years! Smooth work, I'd call it!"

"Me think so somebody watch Joe," said Skookum Jim. "Ketch um hide dust. By an' by shoot Joe and steal um dust. You think so?"

"Looks so," admitted Barton, his eye keenly upon Jim. "How far your cabin, Skookum?" he inquired, rising to his feet and turning to face the old Indian.

"Four mile—maybe five mile," replied Jim.

"How you come here, Skookum? Over the mountain or around?"

"Me come 'round mountain. Me look um trap."

Barton pondered a moment, still closely watching the Indian. Georgie scribbled with renewed vigor; the others watched the play between the white man and the red.

"How long you stop here—last night?" Barton inquired softly.

"Me no stop 'tall," replied Jim. "Me plenty big hurry up. Joe he dead, me ver' sick! Me go tell sheriff."

"You come here drunk, last night, Jim?"

"Me no come here dronk. Me fin' Joe dead—me feel —— bad! Me fin' Joe's medicine whisky on shelf—me get plenty dronk!"

"You told me last night that you examined the body. How about it?"

"Me look see, one breath, no more. Me grab whisky, go way plenty —— quick!"

"You look for tracks—while the rest of us were inside?"

"Look um track no good. Too much dry sand. Track fill up plenty quick; old track, new track, all same. No good look um track."

"I reckon you're right about that," Barton agreed. "Nevertheless we'll look around a bit before we go."

The deputy carefully examined the ground in the vicinity of the cabin, but, as Skookum had said, there was too much dry sand and the tracks told him nothing.

Georgie Wimple remained near the spring while the search was going on. He gathered up a handful of sand and examined it carefully, then tossed it down and dropped to his knees. His eyes glowed with excitement as he bent low to inspect the ground; he muttered to himself, glanced surreptitiously at the others, scribbled rapidly in his note-book, then sprang to his feet and joined the deputy's party.

The deputy at last abandoned the search and brought the led horse to the cabin; the body was presently carried out and securely lashed to the saddle. This gruesome matter attended to, Barton turned to Skookum Jim.

"Fork your kiuse, Jim," he ordered, shortly, "and show us the way."

"Me no come 'long," returned Jim. "Me got plenty trap. Me look um trap—go 'long home."

"We'll not bother about traps just now," said the deputy, with his blandest smile; "we're not going to town just yet—we're taking a little trip around to look your cabin over, first. So fork your hawse and take the *lead;* I'm aimin' to keep my eye on you, because we *might* find some of Shorty Joe's dust at Skookum Jim's cabin, you know. I've seen stranger things happen!"

Skookum Jim looked in blank amazement at the deputy. Barton laughed heartily, Jim shrugged, then turned and silently mounted the horse. The others mounted and Jim led the way along the trail.

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IT WAS nearing the noon-hour when Barton's little party dismounted and tied their horses to young balm-trees near Skookum Jim's cabin. It was a crude, one-room affair, built entirely of logs and shakes, and there was no lock. Barton glanced sharply around, then led the way into the cabin.

There was no floor, a roomy fireplace occupied one end, a large cast-iron pot hung over the dead ashes. A rough table, two home-made chairs and a narrow cot covered with blankets composed the furnishings. A box containing provisions occupied a corner near the fireplace, a half-empty bag of flour hung suspended from the roof by a small rope, safely beyond the reach of persistent pack-rats.

The deputy searched the room with great care, then passed outside and searched persistently everywhere about the cabin. The others followed him around, silent for the most part, watching him, secretly pleased at his failure. Skookum Jim's face was a mask as he trailed silently along behind.

"It stumps me," the deputy admitted, finally, pausing near the cabin door.

He tipped his hat back and scratched his head, ruefully; then, ignoring Jim's presence he said—

"I made sure we'd find Joe's dust without much trouble; but I've got to admit that right now she looks like a sure-enough water-haul."

The shadow of a smile played upon Skookum Jim's face; Barton paced uneasily to and fro for a time, then suddenly halted.

"Shucks!" he exclaimed irritably, "I ain't satisfied, yet! Jim was drunk as a boiled owl last night, and I made up my mind right then that he had killed Shorty Joe. You never know what a man will do when he's drunk, you know. The way I looked at it, he'd naturally play on his friendship with Joe; he'd kill Joe and steal his dust; and by bringing in the news himself, nobody would suspicion him. And naturally, if he thought himself safe, he'd bring the dust straight home where he could keep his eye on it and amuse himself by pawin' it over. That's the way it looked to me, last night. And when he found that stone today, and was so slick and handy about explainin' just how the whole thing was done—well, it looked to me like a cinch. But maybe I was wrong. I admit straight out that I'm beat, and if any of you fellows have anything to say, spit it out. I'd be glad to have somebody set me straight about this thing."

The others had been surprized at Barton's first insinuations concerning Skookum Jim; but, while they were not in sympathy with him on this point, there could be no doubt that his suspicions were more or less justified, and now that he had opened his mind and directly accused the Indian, they would require time to adjust themselves to this new situation.

Thus no one spoke for a time, then the deputy suddenly roused himself and passed into the cabin again. The others followed to stand staring around, looking rather foolish, then Barton stepped over and tapped the bag of flour.

"We've looked everywhere else," he smiled, "so we might as well examine this bag and call it a day."

He untied the rope and lowered the bag to the floor and ran a hand deep into the flour, and a moment later dragged out a well-filled buckskin-bag.

"There's your dust!" he exclaimed, slapping the bag with his free hand. "I knew —— well it was around here—some place! Here, Hardpan; you savvy dust—how much is in her?"

Dave Pence and Georgie looked dazedly on as Hardpan took the bag; Skookum Jim stood with bowed head, silently staring at the floor. Davis carried the bag to the door, where he examined the contents in the sunlight. He grasped a handful of the yellow dust and let it dribble slowly back into the bag.

"She's good grade," he presently declared, "fifteen—maybe sixteen to the ounce."

He tested the bag in his hand, then passed it back to Barton.

"About eighty ounces," he added shortly, "and at fifteen to the ounce she'll run around twelve hundred dollars. Over a thousand, anyhow."

"Well, I reckon this just about settles the business," said Barton, glancing keenly at Skookum Jim. "Got a gun on you, Jim?"

Very slowly Skookum Jim dragged a Colt .44 from inside his frayed old flannel shirt and passed it over to the deputy. Barton glanced into the muzzle, sniffed it, then examined the cylinder.

"One shell empty," he said, softly, "and the gun was fired not over twenty-four

hours back. It's a .44, Shorty Joe was killed with a .44!

"Me shoot um kiotey in trap," Skookum explained briefly.

"We found *two* bullets in the cabin wall," Dave Pence suggested.

Right," admitted Barton. "But that is easy explained, and I'll have to hold him."

Then, turning to the Indian—

"I'm arresting you, Skookum Jim, for the murder of Shorty Joe Lennon!"

Skookum Jim stared dazedly at the deputy for a moment, then glanced around at the others as if looking for sympathy or a friendly eye.

"No tricks, Skookum!" exclaimed the deputy, poking the gun into the Indian's ribs. "The first funny move you make I'll drill you. Put out your hands!"

Barton drew a pair of handcuffs from his pocket; Skookum Jim eyed Barton for a moment, then bowed his head and covered his face with his hands. The hands were shaking when he presently put them out, but he shut his teeth hard and said never a word as the steel circles clicked shut around his wrists. The deputy now motioned toward the door and Skookum Jim led the way to where the horses were tied. Barton helped the Indian to mount, then turned to Hardpan Davis.

"What do you think about it now?" he asked, with an odd smile.

"Looks bad," Davis admitted, "but I've been thinkin' this thing over, and I'll tell you right now, there's something good and plenty wrong—some place! Jim never killed Shorty Joe. They've been friends too long!"

"You hate to admit the truth when it's shoved in your face," Barton laughed. "Jim was drunk last night, and that explains everything. We've got plenty of evidence to hang him higher than a kite!"

"Maybe so," Davis conceded, "but I'm one man that's got to be showed. You may think you've got old Jim as good as hung, but I'm a-sayin' the case ain't really started—yet!"

Saying which, Davis swung on to his horse and the party was soon on its way to town. Because of the body, they rode slowly, and it was well past five o'clock when they rode up and tied their horses in front of the village undertaking establishment. They dismounted, and Barton guarded the prisoner while the others unlashed the body.

The coroner and Barton's office deputy arrived with the swiftly growing crowd; the coroner took charge of the body, Barton turned the horses over to his assistant and set out for the jail with Skookum Jim. The crowd followed, elbowing and talking excitedly; Davis called Georgie and Dave Pence aside. They talked in low tones for a moment, made an appointment to meet later in Georgie's room, then turned to take care of their horses.

AT NINE that night Davis, Georgie and Pence met in Georgie's room to hold a private conference.

"I don't like the looks of this business," said Davis gruffly, when they had taken their seats. "There's sure somethin' wrong, somewhere, but I can't seem to lay my finger on it yet. Dang queer break Barton made—about his dad—when Shorty Joe's hair dropped out of that cap! What do you fellers think about it?"

"He was sure shook up some!" said Pence, briefly.

"It jarred him—there ain't no doubt about that," said Hardpan positively. "What do you think about it, Wimple?"

"Well," replied Georgie, non-committally, "he'd naturally be surprized, you know—I was surprized, myself."

"Right enough," agreed Davis. "But you didn't holler about it, at that. Barton was more'n just su'prized; he was knocked plumb silly for a minute. There's more to this here business than we've been dreamin' about—or I'm a —— poor guesser. And that crack Claude made about his dad: *Where* does *Tex* Barton come in at, anyhow? Last word Claude said before he choked himself off was, 'Go,' wasn't it? Said if his father knowed about this he'd go— That's the way I remember it. Am I right?"

"Sure, you're right," replied Pence. "I noticed particular."

"I can soon settle the matter," said Georgie, pulling out his note-book, "I took it down in short. Here it is," he went on, after a moment; "here is exactly what he said: 'My ——! It's a woman! If father knew this he'd go—' And right there he broke off short."

"Well, then," queried Davis, "where did Claude think the old one would go, and why?"

"Go wild—or crazy, maybe," Pence suggested.

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"Like enough," said Davis. "That's the way she's been lookin' to me all the time. Why? That's the point!"

"He probably just meant that his father would be shocked if he knew that an old woman had been murdered in such a manner," replied Georgie. "That would be only natural, wouldn't it?"

"Right again," agreed Davis, "but why did he cut himself off so —— sudden-like? That wasn't natural—not by a —— sight! Something made him lose his head, right thar, and he said something he wasn't aimin' to say. And why didn't he go right out there last night instead of waitin' till mawnin'? Waitin' for daylight sounded all right, the way Claude put it, but the more a feller looks it over the more he sees that it wasn't all right.

"The time to hunt a murderer is right now; and puttin' the job off till daylight is somethin' that simply ain't done in these parts. Anyhow, I don't believe for a second that Skookum Jim ever killed Shorty Joe. I've got a lot of good reasons for thinkin' that way, but one is enough—Shorty Joe was robbed, and Skookum don't care for money. He don't need it!"

"How about that bag of dust in Jim's flour?" Pence inquired.

"Just a plant," returned Davis. "I've seen the like, more than once. Jim may be a fool, but he ain't fool enough to hide any stolen dust in his own cabin. Nobody but a plumb lunatic would do that! What else have you got in that note-book, Wimple? Suppose you read it to us. Maybe it will give us an idea."

Georgie flushed and objected strenuously, but at last Davis had his way and Georgie read the notes aloud. The others laughed uproariously, at one point, but in the end they were serious enough. The reading concluded they discussed the situation gravely for a time, then parted for the night.

Early on the following morning they met again, and as a result of this conference either Davis or Pence was thereafter constantly on watch at the Silver Dollar Saloon.

ON THE third day Tex Barton rode up and tied his horse in front of the Silver Dollar; his first trip to town since the death of Shorty Joe. Short, heavy-set and powerful, square-featured, with a three weeks' stubble of black shoe-brush beard slightly streaked with gray; wearing two belts and two six-shooters, the grim old sheriff was a formidable-looking figure as he climbed to the porch and limped into the barroom.

Hardpan Davis was on guard at the time, watching from the vantage point of a grocery-store next door, and the instant the sheriff disappeared he was on his way to the *Messenger* office. He returned almost immediately, accompanied by Georgie Wimple. Georgie stepped inside the barroom door to stand guard; Davis glanced up and down the street and, finding himself unobserved, quickly approached the sheriff's horse.

He drew a heavy knife from his pocket and snapped it open, then picked up one of the animal's front feet. He pried loose a cake of dried mud, scraped the "frog" clean and picked with the knife-point under the edge of the shoe, then dropped the foot and hastily climbed to the porch. He opened the door and beckoned to Georgie, and the old miner's face wore a grim smile as the two set off together in the direction of the *Messenger* office.

AT TWELVE o'clock that night fourteen carefully picked men met in a disused barn and by the light of a smoky lantern organized a vigilance committee with Hardpan Davis as chief.

On the second following morning, a little after four o'clock, Tex Barton emerged from the kitchen door of his ranch-house, carrying a lantern in his right hand and a sizable grub-box in the crook of his left arm. He approached the family hack, which had been drawn up in front of the granary door, and slipped the grub-box under the seat, then went on to the barn.

He fed his driving-team from a bag that stood in front of the manger, then returned to the hack, climbed into it, swung the granary door open and dropped to the floor. He set the lantern down on the floor, then swiftly dug his way into the center of a huge pile of bags of grain.

At last he selected one—which he easily identified by means of a tag attached to one of its "ears"—and dragged it out to the light. He eyed the bag speculatively for a moment, then picked it up and swung it into the hack, behind the seat.

His movements had been a bit peculiar,

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perhaps; but not too peculiar, for to the chance or casual observer it would have been perfectly clear that Sheriff Tex Barton was making ready for a trip to the railroad at Horton. It was nearly seventy mountainous, rocky miles to Horton; the sheriff would camp that night at Bush Creek, with forty miles behind him, and would need food for himself and grain for his horses.

Tex Barton now picked up his lantern, crawled into the hack, dropped to the ground again and made his way to the barn to harness his team. As he disappeared into the barn, a dark figure slipped silently from behind the granary and climbed into the hack. Moving swiftly he lifted one end of the bag of grain, dropped it and lifted the other end, then dropped to the ground and, skirting the buildings, ran fleetly to a clump of trees which stood perhaps a hundred yards down the road to Redmont.

He disappeared among the trees, and a moment later a horseman emerged and rode slowly toward the town. For a quarter of a mile the rider proceeded cautiously, then set spurs to his horse and rode on at a hard gallop. Ten minutes later Tex Barton drove down the road at a swinging trot, and shortly after he passed the trees another rider stepped his horse quietly into the road and followed, keeping far enough behind so that he followed by sound rather than sight.

There were several routes by which Tex Barton might pass through the town of Redmont, but only one bridge across the river which flowed past just beyond the town. Barton chose to skirt the town, keeping as far as possible away from the more thickly settled sections. Thus he drove half-around the town, then turned back toward the main road and presently came near the bridge. Day was breaking when he slowed his team to a walk and started up the approach to the bridge.

A thicket of hemp grew on either side of the road, and suddenly five men sprang from these high weeds and the command, "Hands up!" rang out sharply on the still morning air.

One seized the horses by the bits, the others trained their pistols on the man in the hack. Then Tex Barton, despising the fearful odds against him, dropped the lines and lived up to a lifetime boast.

He drew both guns, a fusillade of pistol shots rang out instantly, Barton rolled backward over the seat and down upon the bag of grain.

A moment after the echo of the shots died away, Claude Barton, gun in hand, stepped from the door of the sheriff's office. He was hatless and barefoot, clad only in shirt and trousers. He stared at the party near the bridge, perhaps a hundred yards away, then turned swiftly—to face the leveled guns of a party of men who had just stepped from behind the building.

Claude Barton, showing far better judgment than his sire, dropped his gun and threw up his hands. The men sprang upon the porch and seized the deputy. Davis relieved him of his extra gun and picked the other up from the floor. The party from the bridge now came up with Dave Pence driving Tex Barton's team. Two men were supporting the sheriff behind the seat; Pence stopped the rig beside the porch. Hardpan Davis cautioned the others to watch the deputy closely, then drew out his pocket-knife as he turned to the hack.

As he snapped the knife open he glanced at the sheriff, who now showed signs of returning consciousness. Hardpan's mind ran strongly upon another matter, however, and he instantly turned his attention to the bag of grain. With a single vicious slash he ripped the bag from end to end, the loose barley spilled out, and Hardpan presently dragged from it and tossed upon the porch no less than eight small bags of gold-dust—Shorty Joe's hoardings for more than thirty years.

"There!" said Davis, as he tossed the last bag down. "There's Shorty Joe's dust! And now I reckon there ain't nobody got any doubts about who done the whole —— job!"

Then Davis turned his attention to the sheriff.

TEX BARTON presently revived for a moment, but the sands of life were running fast and he had only time to gasp a few words:

"I killed Shorty Joe," he said huskily, "shot him through the window and stole his gold. I did it alone—nobody else had anything to do with it. Nobody knew—anything—about——"

His voice trailed off, and a moment later he passed on.

"He's dead," said Davis bluntly. "He's

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meat for the coroner—it's good riddance of —— bad rubbish, so there's nothin' to cry about. May as well leave him where he is, and put this other swine away before he gives us the slip."

City Marshal Frayne arrived at this juncture, and rather arrogantly demanded an explanation of all the trouble.

"That will be about all from you!" said Davis sharply. "You're a little late. The committee's runnin' things, right now; you'll get your explanation when the time comes. Just step into the office."

Davis shoved the deputy into the office, admitted the marshal and Georgie Wimple, then closed the door and sprang the lock.

"Your old man tried hard to ease you out of this scrape," said Davis, turning a hard eye upon the deputy, "and of course nobody's sayin' a thing against that. But it's no use, young man—you'll be strung up inside of thirty minutes unless you spill the whole story and spill it straight. Don't make any mistake about it! Only Skookum Jim's friends can stand betwixt you and the rope. So come through, give us the straight of the whole thing, and we'll see to it that you get a fair trial in court. Otherwise, salt won't save you, and—speakin' for myself—I'll he'p drag on the rope! You understand the way she lays?"

"Yes," replied Barton, "I know all about that. And I'll tell you straight—I'd rather stretch a rope, right now, than to go to the pen for life. I'm guilty as ——, men! —But I ain't goin' to hang for killin' Shorty Joe! Father done that. I didn't——"

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed Davis. "Gimme the keys. I want Skookum Jim to hear this."

Barton pulled the jail keys from his pocket and handed them to Davis, then glanced sharply through the window.

"It's no use, Claude," said Davis, smiling grimly, "there's a dozen men layin' for you out there—you'd be dead before you hit the ground. And now," he added, "you fellers may as well set down while I go and get Jim."

Barton dropped his glance to the floor and nervously drummed his chair with his fingers, when Davis presently returned with Skookum Jim. The confinement had been a severe trial and the old Indian looked strangely aged and haggard as he sank weakly into a chair. Davis remained standing.

"Well," said Davis, "we're all set, Claude; and I reckon you understand that we want it straight—and all of it."

"I ain't aimin' to hold anything back," replied the deputy, glancing nervously around, "and there ain't no use of makin' a long story out of it, I reckon. It all started by accident. I was hunting horses and stopped about a mile from Joe's cabin. I swept the country with my field-glasses and happened to swing them on to the cabin just as Joe was hiding a bag of dust in the spring. This was months back, and I kept Joe's secret until about two weeks ago. Considered it a point of honor, you know—though of course you won't believe that. It's true just the same. Well, father told me one day that the mortgage on the ranch would soon be due, and if he couldn't raise at least five thousand dollars he'd more than likely lose the ranch. Then the devil put Joe's cache in my mind; and the upshot of it was we planned the robbery.

"We tied handkerchiefs over our faces, and father watched Joe through the window while I went to the spring to get the dust. I lifted the flat stone out of the spring—it was heavy and wet and slipped out of my hand. Joe had just set down to eat his supper, with his back to the window. He heard the noise and turned around to look back, and right then father's mask slipped down. Joe recognized him, and father lost his head and fired. He overshot and Joe jumped up, then he fired again. Then we made off with the gold as fast as we could. That, men, is the truth, and all of it—believe me or not."

"Not quite all!" said Davis grimly. "You forgot part of it. How about that bag of dust in Skookum Jim's flour-sack? We'd sure like to know how that got there!"

Barton hung his head.

"I reckon that was the worst part of the whole business," he said with a deep sigh, still looking down. "But it's done and it can't be mended—I—I can't talk about it, and that's all to it!"

There was a pause, the others silently watching the broken young man. Claude was the first to speak.

"One thing I'd like to know," he said, looking up. "If you don't mind telling me I'd like to know how you come to spot our trail."

"Well," replied Davis, "I reckon there ain't any good reason why I shouldn't tell

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you how it was. It started first from that loony remark you blurted out when you pulled Shorty Joe's cap off and the hair fell out of it. You brung your father's name in, you know—and you acted —— queer, too. That's where the suspicion begun, but we got our real start from Georgie's note-book that you fellers been havin' so much fun about.

"You see, me and Georgie and Pence had a little meetin' after we got home that night and we couldn't remember exactly what it was you said when you pulled Shorty Joe's cap off. Well, Georgie had took it down in this here short writin', so he got out the book and give us the straight of it, right there. Then I made him read the whole works—all he set down that day—and it was funny, all right—one place in pe'ticular. You see, he thought the mica in that sand up there was gold! He was all worked up about it, and was plumb crazy with the idea that he'd found out where Shorty Joe got all his gold.

"Well, Pence and me had a good laugh about it, then I happened to look at my own boots—and they was regular plastered with mica. That put an idea in my head: There ain't no mica in the country, except up around Diablo Mountain, and by watchin' for the stuff on people's boots we might maybe stumble on to the cur that killed Shorty Joe. Your dad was under suspicion—on account of the way you jerked his name out that night—so we fixed to watch him.

"Then I got to scoutin' around and found out that your dad had got that old single-footer shod, only three days before the killin'. I knew that the hawse hadn't been shod for years; that he wasn't wuth shoein' for hard ridin' in the hills; and that made me suspicious that— Well, if the *hawse* had mica on his feet, it was a safe bet that Tex had been up around Joe's place. So we laid for the hawse, and when your dad rode him in we had a look at a foot. We found enough mica to set a tender-foot crazy!

"The rest was easy. We set a watch on the ranch, night and day, and this mawnin' 'long about four o'clock, your dad come out and begun gettin' ready for a trip to town. I happened to be on guard. Tex had a lantern, and I watched him through a crack in the granary. And when he dug plumb into the middle of a big pile to drag out a certain pe'ticular bag of grain— Well, I knowed, right then, that Shorty Joe's dust was in that grain-bag along with the barley, and that Tex was aimin' to smuggle it out to the railroad. The rest you can guess," Davis concluded abruptly.

Claude Barton shook his head slowly, his glance on the floor, then rubbed his eyes vigorously as if to dispel an ugly vision. Skookum Jim rose quietly and stood looking steadfastly at the shamed young deputy, and at last Claude looked up and met the old Indian's eye for the first time. For just a second his glance held, then shifted to the floor again.

"Young man feel ver' bad," said the Indian softly, holding out both hands in a gesture of sympathy. "No feel bad 'bout me, please," he went on as Claude looked up, "me old, pretty soon die anyhow. To-day, tomorrow, no matter. Hardpan, he say ol' man dead. Ver' good! Ol' man know better. Claude, he just boy. No think um much. Skookum all time like to be good man. Me forget all 'bout little trouble—me shake hands!"

The Indian held out his hand; the white man hesitated, amazed, unable to understand. At last, wondering, his lip quivering, Claude Barton rose slowly and grasped the Indian's hand. Neither spoke, slowly their hands unclasped, then Skookum Jim turned and passed silently out to the street, while the others all sat staring.

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HURRICANE WILLIAMS' VENGEANCE

A FOUR-PART STORY

Part II

By Gordon Young

Author of "Horrezko," "Wrong Blood—Strong Blood," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

It was not quite by chance that McGuire and Delaney met Pete Mathers. They found him lying on a mat in the shade of a breadfruit-tree. He was quite drunk.

McGuire and Delaney offered him one hundred dollars to take them to an island in the Solomons and, because Mathers needed just that sum to buy a native girl, Mathers agreed to give them passage.

"I'm not leavin' for three or four days," he said. "Be back here tomorrow or the next day."

But McGuire and Delaney put no faith in the gross man and smuggled themselves on board the *Jack and Jill* that day. They hid in one of the cabins and so witnessed the cold-blooded bargaining of Mathers with Buli for the girl A-Ina.

That same afternoon Mathers sailed.

A little later the two men emerged from their hiding-place and prevented Mathers from abusing A-Ina. They made Mathers a prisoner and took command of the ship.

Mathers, fearing for his life, confessed the true story of the attack on the *Good Shepherd*. He told how Slade Willerby's men, impersonating Hurricane Williams and *his* men, had attacked the mission ship, brutally killing the bishop and his followers—men and women. Falsely accused of that evil deed Hurricane Williams had been out-lawed and a price put upon his head.

"Why did Willerby do it—the *Good Shepherd*?" McGuire asked.

"I'll tell you. The missionaries always fought hard against the Willerbys, an' Bishop Johnson led 'em.' Slade said: 'We'll just put an end to this —— old church meddler, and make it hot for that blasted Williams, too. But it was Terry Rand that showed him how to do it. It was Terry what played you, McGuire."

"After I have met the gentleman he may not care as much for the part," McGuire murmured mildly.

The course of the *Jack and Jill* was now set for Bakari—Hurricane Williams' headquarters.

The Kanaka crew accepted the new order of things, but it was obvious that, should Mathers appear, they would rally to their old captain. Consequently Delaney and McGuire kept watch and watch. It is well they did so for Mathers managed to escape from his cabin, and persuaded the Kanakas to rush McGuire. But that man was on the alert, and the attack failed.

About the middle of the afternoon McGuire saw a high-stemmed war-canoe coming for them at a speed that caused the water to fly from the bow. Almost at the same time another canoe glided from behind a small island ahead.

The natives had seen the ship, and maneuvered to approach it from two directions.

THE canoes came on rapidly, with tufts of colored grass streaming from the top of the slender bows, twelve feet high. Under that grass McGuire knew were the skulls of those who had been killed at the launching of the canoes. These were no out-rigger canoes, but works of craftsmanship and beauty, made of planks hewn from trees with shell adze, the bows being symmetrically studded with cowrie shell, and the fifty-foot sides of the canoe inlaid with

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patterns of shell. The sterns were almost, though not quite, as high as the bows, giving the canoes a crescent shape. The swiftest rowing-crafts ever fashioned were those of the old head-hunters of the Solomons.

Delaney came aft, and asked:

"What yez think? Are they from Bakari, or bay they some other haythens out to do murther?"

"If they are only those two they are from Bakari. Or some neighboring village. Raiders making an attack on the villages hereabouts wouldn't dare come with just a hundred men. Marugi would be too glad to see them."

The canoe that was bearing down on them from dead ahead, swerved off as it came closer and backed water, slowing down, with all eyes aboard her staring at the little schooner. The faces of the blacks were streaked with colored clay, giving them an appearance at once ghastly and devilish.

McGuire gave the wheel to Delaney and going to the side, cupped his hands and shouted:

"What men are you? What village?"

He could see the natives looking around, one at another, then he was answered with a yell that was at once taken up by all the savages. They flourished their paddles. The boat steerer stood up as if to jump from the canoe while he gestured wildly. The natives in the second canoe took up the yelling, but redoubled their strokes, bearing as straight for the schooner as an arrow.

Mathers came running along the deck, shouting:

"Give me a rifle! We'll kill what we can, but us fellows are done for. They're comin' to board us!"

The hard grain of the white man was under Mathers' whisky fat. He was badly frightened, but he knew it was useless to parley with savages that were out for blood.

But Delaney roared at him from behind the wheel—

"Bay quiet!"

McGuire turned from the rail:

"Bring her to, Pat. They're from Bakari."

Delaney put down the helm. In a minute the second canoe, backing water, scraped alongside the schooner, and savages were scrambling up the free-board, yelling like fiends. The other canoe, with a sharp turn, also came alongside, and the small deck swarmed with savages that leaped about, pressing in on McGuire and Delaney, shouting at them, grinning, laughing. Marugi was not with them, but some were natives who had been among those that Williams had returned to the village. They all knew McGuire and Delaney, and took Mathers for one of their friends.

The leader of one canoe was Ghobau, a small old savage with a pendulous lower lip and tiny eyes set in a withered face, a cunning fighter, with face unpainted, but his naked body was covered with scars, some of them artificial, put on in his far-off youth for adornment. He had no ornament but a crescent clam-shell suspended around his neck, which denoted his high caste.

The leader of the other canoe was Kivkto, a younger man, a dandy, with red lime-colored hair, with necklaces and armlets and a boar's tooth through his nose; a ferocious warrior, and a very brave fellow with a rashness in his bravery that savages seldom have.

"When have you seen Williams?" asked McGuire.

"Four months ago he left," said Ghobau.

"He brought a white man to our village, saying, 'This man is my friend,'" said Kivkto.

"His name?"

"Him we call Lesel," Ghobau answered. "He is a strange man, who pays our boys that they will bring him butterflies and birds. Lesel is one that is liked.

"Where is Marugi?"

They told McGuire that five war canoes had been off on a great hunt, and were now returning to the villages after swooping down on an enemy two days away that had killed some Bakari men and would not make the payment that Marugi, who was now chief because his father was too old, had demanded. Marugi was in one of the other canoes that had taken a different passage after they entered the lagoon.

Ghobau had no sooner heard of the attack made by the crew the night before than there was a rush into the forecastle. The two that were left of the crew were dragged from the locker where they had hidden and were chopped to pieces. The dripping heads were held up by the hair, while the savages danced about.

Had the crew been successful the night before, it would have been McGuire's and

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Delaney's heads that savages danced around.

"Let me have a drink! For God's sake let me have a drink!" cried Mathers, pressing toward the companion where McGuire stood, and by blocking the way kept the savages from going below.

"Lock yourself in," said McGuire, letting himself pass.

"This man is a coward," Ghobau declared, impassively watching Mathers descend, then looking questioningly at McGuire.

"But he is not to be harmed, though no friend of ours, Ghobau. It is for Williams to say when he shall die!"

McGuire, too, wanted a drink. The horrible glee of the savages about those heads made him feel as though the walls of his stomach were beating together; but he knew better than to show any sign of what would have been thought weakness, for savages are savages; at times trusting and generous, at other times fiendish, with no more feeling toward human life than butchers have for the calves they slaughter that the tables of Christians may be loaded with meat.

A-Ina crouched on the skylight, terrified and silent, looking about in a daze. The savages stared at her, went away, gave place to others, returned, pushed their way closer to see her again, spoke one to another. Delaney shouldered his way through, and putting an arm about her lifted her off the skylight.

"She is my woife," he said turning to Kivkto, who had looked at her with eager eyes.

A-Ina snuggled up under Delaney's arm, pressing her face against him.

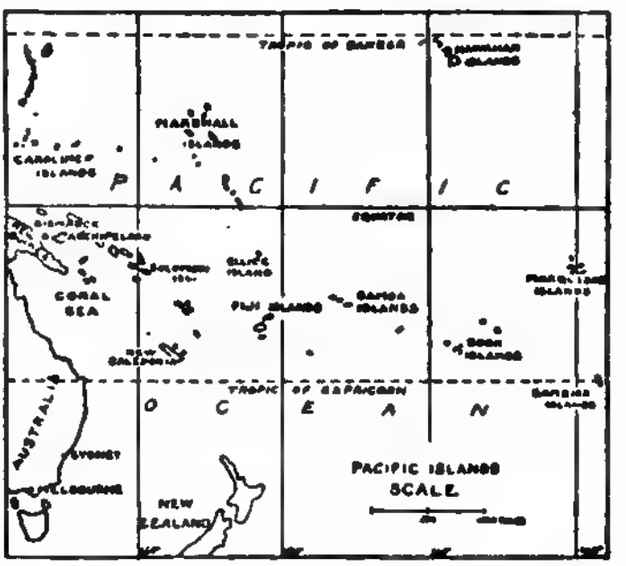
Some of the natives were left on board to work the schooner. The others returned to their canoes, and one of these canoes raced away to take the news to the village, and the other, with the rowers chanting, accompanied the *Jack and Jill*, now circling about her, and showing the way through doubtful passages.

CHAPTER II

I

BAKARI was a village almost entirely concealed from the beach by the jungle, but the houses, deeply thatched with sago-palm leaves, having sharp slanting roofs and eaves within a few feet of the ground, were placed in clearings, yet with no regard for alignment or streets.

The *Jack and Jill* found the village in a high state of excitement, with large preparations going on for a feast because of the return of the successful raiders. Cooking-pots almost as big as coffins and in shape



not unlike them were filled with mashed taro. Pigs were roasting. Vegetables and fruit were heaped in piles on fresh plantain leaves.

The Bakari natives were not large of size but rather shapely, black as Africans, particularly among the higher caste whose features however were not so negroid as the others. Practically all the men, even the children drew patterns of lime or whitened clay on their faces, and their mops of hair were often colored a reddish-yellow. They entirely lacked the merry disposition of many of the natives, particularly the Polynesians; their faces were of sullen aspect, as if somewhat reflecting the darkness of the jungle. They were fierce and savage hunters, treasuring heads as white men treasure gems; storing them in *tambo* houses from which women were barred. Brides were purchased from their fathers, and became little more than the personal slaves of their husbands.

Both men and women went entirely naked except for a strip of pandanus-leaf passed between the loins with each end attached to a girdle of woven grass; but the women wore a sort of plaited pad in the rear, not unlike a floppy bustle which served as a cushion when they squatted. Their teeth was blackened by betel-nut. They

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were cannibals. But among them was a vestige of fine craftsmanship, chiefly distinguished in the making of war-canoes, but occasionally seen in the carving of food-mashers and paddle designs; but most of the work was roughly done, and their devils, which they worshiped with votive offerings of heads, were hideous and rude. They believed in sorcery and their witch-men were poisoners. But the men of Bakari were not thieves—except by right of conquest.

Such were the people among whom McGuire and Delaney had come. Delaney was especially admired, largely because of his great size, fiery whiskers, and the fact that Marugi, the worthy son of a chief who had been a terrible warrior and cunning diplomat in tribal affairs, recognized him as a "brother." Marugi had come on board to welcome and escort them to the village.

With him, eager to see white men, was Laurence La Salle, a tall man, barefoot, but in clean whites, with quiet manner, a peculiarly slow, pleasing smile and features of odd refinement.

He was a young naturalist, with a passion for moths and orchids, and a strong interest in bird-skins, beetles, snakes, flowers, almost anything of Nature's.

"My, but I am glad to see you fellows!" he said to McGuire, pressing his hand with warmth. "My name's La Salle. I understand from the natives that you are friends of the captain who brought me here. Captain Douglas. A fine fellow. Queer fellow, though—a little, isn't he?"

"Yes," said McGuire. "Very queer, at times."

"I have the most amazing story to tell you. The most incredible adventure——"

"About Douglas, is it?"

"Why, no. It's about that island they call Kakarutu. Marugi says you fellows have been there too. I was there about ten days ago—I've been in a daze ever since. I wake up in the night and think it is all a dream. But come, I mustn't spoil a good story by trying to tell it in ten words. My what a pretty girl—almost as pretty in her way as the beautiful——"

Delaney with A-Ina clinging to him had come on deck, ready to leave the schooner, followed by Mathers, who looked dejected and anxious and was half-drunk.

"And that—why who is that?" asked La Salle, now seeing Mathers for the first time and noting his craven aspect.

"It would be spoiling my story if I used twenty words to tell you."

Then noticing La Salle's movement, McGuire added—

"But don't offer him your hand unless you want to give it to a man that boarded the *Good Shepherd!*"

La Salle drew back, staring.

At McGuire's suggestion, Marugi took a wisp of dried grass, tied a knot and fastened it to the slide of the companion, thereby locking it more securely then twenty bolts would have done; for no native, though he knew whisky and rifles were there, would enter where a tabu had been placed.

On shore McGuire and Delaney, with A-Ina, accompanied by La Salle and Marugi, followed by a troop of natives, went directly to the house of the old chief Ngora, who, now rheumatic and scrawny, dozed away his days on a mat in the shade, smoking when he had tobacco, and solacing himself for the weakness of age by remembering his raids, and getting comfort by glancing at the scores of skulls that were set on the rafters of his house.

They brought him presents of tobacco and pipes, with such nicknacks as they had scraped together, tinned stuffs, and two bottles of whisky to warm his chilled blood.

He received them with sluggish dignity, sitting on his withered haunches. As the gifts were placed before him he examined them with interest, but maintained a dignity almost sullen. He asked many questions, to which McGuire gave such answers as seemed fitting; then suddenly lifting his thin rasping voice, addressing his people and indicating McGuire and Delaney, he said:

"Who harms these men or puts his hand to what is theirs, dies. They are my friends."

As they were going away La Salle remarked:

"My word, but you stand high with the old chief. I was told that this was the deadliest part of the Solomons, and that a white man's head wouldn't last longer than a gold coin in a den of pickpockets. But they seem to like white men."

"It's largely just one white man they like. We have sailed with him. They know us."

"You mean Captain Douglas."

"Er, yes—Douglas."

"Queer man," commented La Salle again. "He said to me: 'These are probably the

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worst savages in the South Seas. Cruel, treacherous, and bloodthirsty. But at that, La Salle, better than most of the white men down here.' "

That night while the village feasted and howled, chanted and danced, McGuire and Delaney, bringing A-Ina with them, came to La Salle's house.

Like most of the houses in the village it appeared to be poorly built, as if it could be pushed over; but nothing less than a hurricane could have flattened it out, and the lagoon was outside of the hurricane zone. It consisted of one oblong room, of about twenty by sixteen feet, with but one opening, and that the door, with a raised threshold of coral rock some eighteen inches high. The roof was sharply peaked, heavily covered with palm leaves, and thoroughly water-proof. The sides were of a sort of matting. Four upright posts supported the roof-beam, and between two of these La Salle swung a ship's hammock when he turned in. The floor was the ground, with mat spread under the hammock, and a lantern swung on a cord and hook from the beam. At night he closed the door with a frame made of split palm to keep out the dogs and pigs that wandered about the village.

Inside, opposite the door, was a hole in the ground where a fire was lighted every day, though a shed where a boy cooked for him was behind the house. But every day La Salle filled his room with smoke to preserve the drying skins from mold and moths before they were smeared with an arsenic paste and packed away. Above the fireplace was a swinging-table, made like a grating, so that the smoke would pass through the interstices and thoroughly saturate the specimens laid there. A large table was by the door to get the light when he worked at bird-skinning and arranged his moths; and this was strewn with scissors and scalpels. By the wall on one side of the room were placed stores and trade-goods, mostly tobacco and beads, with an assortment of butcher-knives; and on the other side were cases for storing his treasures.

He had a rifle, a revolver, two shotguns—one of which was used for dust-shot in bringing down very small birds—and a butterfly-net.

The house belonged to the old chief Ngora.

La Salle welcomed them with a show of eagerness in his quiet manner. He had been awaiting them since sun-down, and now laid aside his pipe to place boxes for seats, and offered A-Ina the only camp-stool while he sat on the head of a cask. But she, unused to raised seats, sat on the floor by the knee of Delaney and leaned against him, repeatedly looking up into his face.

La Salle brought out a half-empty bottle of gin, but having only two tin cups, took half a coconut shell for himself.

"I am here," he said in answer to McGuire's questions, "because I wanted to go where I could find something new."

His voice was pleasant and he spoke with poise. His face was clean-shaven; his features were rather thin and well formed, and he had dark-blue, steady eyes.

"A naturalist is just about like a gold digger," he said with a slight smile, "only instead of going into all the out-of-the-way places after nuggets he wants to find something which his fellow naturalists will name after him—in Latin. That is fame."

He gave a quiet laugh, and paused to relight his pipe. From a distance they heard the strange penetrating chant of a war-song and thump of wooden drums, above which rose the frequent shouts of voices. Moths hovered with a buzzing flutter about the lantern.

"I wanted to go where nobody had been before, at least no naturalist. I thought of Africa first, but I did not have the funds to support any kind of an expedition, and travel into the only parts of Africa where I would have cared to go is expensive. Then I thought of South America, but that would require much the same expense as Africa. I studied the map for a place that was comparatively easy of access, where there was jungle and savages. I talked with scientists and orchid lovers and decided on the Solomons; so I started for the South Seas, without knowing much more about where I was going to bring up than if I had taken passage for the moon.

"When I arrived in San Francisco I went along the waterfront to find somebody who would give me passage to the Solomons, and I learned that I would probably have to go to Sydney first and go out with a blackbirder. When those old South Sea captains found out that I wanted to look for butterflies and flowers, they said that I was crazy, and that a lone white man like myself would be killed the first day he landed.

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"One day an old fellow pointed to a low black-hulled, three-masted schooner lying out in the bay. He said to me:

" 'See that schooner? She belongs to Captain Douglas. He's just come in with a load of shell he's not saying where he got, but I'm willing to bet he fished it in the Solomons. You go out and talk with him. He may throw you overboard, but a fellow that wants to be eaten by cannibals oughtn't to mind. He's got some Solomon Islanders on board.'

"I went out to the schooner and a black with a white stick through his nose, and a mop of bushy hair, asked me what I wanted. I told him I wanted to speak with Captain Douglas. He made me wait in the boat alongside, and presently a white man came on deck and stared down at me. He had a short, thick beard and the strangest eyes I ever saw. Somehow I felt that he was looking through my head and into every thought I ever had.

"I told him what I wanted, and he looked at me a long time, then said I could come on deck. Right away, I found I had to do with an educated man, and I saw, too, that he was finding out if I was really a naturalist.

"Then he said:

" 'La Salle, so far as I know every native in the Solomons is a cannibal; and to him a white man's head is the most valuable thing he can ever hope to get hold of. Practically every white man the natives have ever seen has cheated, or robbed or murdered or kidnaped them, or left them disease. They scarcely know one white man from another.'

"I told him I was going to risk it, anyhow. That I would get there some way. That if naturalists hung back until a country was civilized, or made safe, that everything they wanted to find would be destroyed.

"He walked away, thoughtful for a long time; then said he knew of a village where I would be reasonably safe.

" 'If you were anything but a naturalist, La Salle,' he said, 'I would not take you. But I once had an interest in marine life. That is what first took me to the South Seas. I know something of how you feel.'

"He told me what to lay in for tradegoods, and how to go about getting the natives to bring in specimens. I am still discovering every day how well he knew the native character in the advice he gave. I found all manner of highly technical books in his cabin, and discovered in his conversation that he was a most extraordinary man. But both you men know him. Have you any idea how he came to be merely a knockabout captain? Some tragedy, I would guess from the way he hates white men, or seems to—though he was wonderfully kind to me, but in a strange, at times almost fierce, way.

"On the trip down he turned me over to that cannibal I had seen over the rail when I first came to the ship; and this man, Soba—a really decent sort of chap, I found him—had me so that when we arrived I could really talk to them pretty well in their own language. I certainly have blessed Captain Douglas for that forethought."

"Where did he go?" McGuire asked. "We came to find him."

"He did not say, and of course I could not question him. He said he would return when he got around to it. Marugi told me that Cappy Illum—I wonder why they call him Illum?—was after pearls."

II

THE sound and clamor of the natives suddenly grew so loud that La Salle stopped and for a moment they all listened; and they knew that a mock battle was going on, but the yelling and shrieks were so realistic that A-Ina trembled and pressed closer to Delaney.

"I have been present at two of those feasts," said La Salle, "and the first time I was pretty badly frightened; and—" he added with a significant expression of disgust—"it was several days before I could eat. Then I had to remember that a Brahman priest would be just as sickened by seeing me gorging on something that looked like cow-meat as I was by what I saw—or thought I did. And in wandering hereabouts through the jungle I have come on wooden idols, painted and ghastly, under little sharp-peaked sheds, with skulls heaped all around.

"At first it gave me a sensation that a quart of tea, well-laced with gin, would hardly overcome; but I have either gotten used to it, or been able to pull myself out of that sort of funk by remembering that less than ten generations ago my own people were putting the dripping heads of their

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enemies on pikes, while mobs of good citizens danced and howled about them; and it isn't so very long ago that the bodies of the hanged were left dangling on high hills until they rotted and fell apart.

"The better I know these people the less they seem like savages in spite of all the horrible things they do. I have had lots of time to do nothing but think, and every day I see a wider streak of human nature running through them. I follow Captain Douglas' advice and buy every sort of bug or bird they bring; and they are as eager as children about it, and sit around out there under that coconut and chatter with me by the hour. There are two old witch-men here and they both claim me as a member of their brotherhood because they think I gather all these bug and beetles and birds and bulbs for sorcery."

Before La Salle would take up the story of Kakarutu, which he insisted was so strange an adventure that he would often wake up in the night and tell himself he had been dreaming, he showed that he was curious about McGuire and Delaney.

The natives' name for McGuire and Delaney was as unrecognizable as "Illum" for Williams; and McGuire, having found that he knew of the *Good Shepherd* tragedy, gave false names for themselves. If Williams had seen fit to conceal his identity, McGuire saw no reason just then for revealing it; and there was no telling at all but that a gunboat, or a blackbirder, or a trader might come into the lagoon and meet with La Salle.

Already La Salle had said of Mathers—

"You mean he is one of the ruffians that murdered those missionaries?"

"Yes. He admits it."

"Is he Williams?"

"He says his name is Mathers."

Then McGuire had told how they caught Mathers, of the trip down, of the fight and arrival.

"We got separated from Captain Douglas over in Samoa. We were up in the hills, hunting. A gunboat came in sight, and Captain Douglas had to leave. So we made our way down here, knowing that we would meet up with him sooner or later."

"Had to leave? A gunboat? Why, what has he done? I was sure he had a history!"

"Oh nothing much. As he told you, he has made a study of marine life. The French call him a pearl poacher. He has fished some pretty rich grounds over in the Paumotas. It is safer down here—for a pearl fisher."

This explanation, as any should that contained so much that was true, seemed reasonable; and it fitted in with what La Salle knew of the man who called himself Captain Douglas.

He congratulated McGuire on the capture of Mathers, but questioned the security of the prisoner who, McGuire explained, was better watched by being turned loose in the village than if he were shut up in a hut with a guard over him.

"Neither Red nor myself want to put in our days and nights standing watch over him; and about the first thing that a detail of native guards would do is to kill him for his head and explain that he had tried to escape. Not that I would greatly care, except that there is the reward, you know. But he has been given a little hut off to himself, and we will pay for food that is brought him every day. Marugi has passed the word that as long as Mathers remains in the village, or between the village and the beach, he is not to be harmed; but anybody that finds him out of bounds may have his head. He couldn't get a hundred yards off without being killed; and if he did get off there are bushmen, and along the beach tribes to the right and left that would pounce on him. Mathers has been down in these seas a long time. He knows what to expect, and he won't make a break into the bush.

"Now let us hear about Kakarutu. You certainly know how to arouse a fellow's curiosity—and make him wait."

"Yis," said Delaney. "Did yez find some ov them divils? We couldn't."

"Yes—and no. Most emphatically no. I found the most beautiful woman I have ever seen."

"Thot is the worst sort ov divil there is," said Delaney, finishing off the gin in his cup.

"Oh!" said A-Ina, sitting up quickly and for a moment staring at him in pretended anger. "And this very night when I ask you, you say—

"'A-Ina, yes you are beau—oo—tiful!'"

"Shh-hh," Delaney replied quickly, feeling a little uncomfortable under the smiling eyes of the two men. "Yez are interrupthin' Misther La Salle."

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III

LA SALLE told them that on the way to Bakari Captain Douglas had passed within a few miles of Kakarutu and had told him something of the island, and its curiously perfect but useless harbor walled in by high cliffs.

His interest as a naturalist had been strongly aroused. He was curious as to what might be found on a little speck of land so completely isolated. Perhaps some form of insect life, extinct in other places where its enemies had crowded in, survived on this inaccessible spot.

At first, however, he had been so taken up with all that he found near at hand in the village that he did not think much of Kakarutu. But he told Marugi that some day he would like to go there; and Marugi had said that natives would not visit the island because of the devils, but as a white man had power over the devils they would go with him, though Marugi was doubtful about remaining several days, as La Salle wished.

Captain Douglas had told him:

"Be friendly with the witch-men. Make them gifts. They can stir up trouble or smooth out difficulties for you. Treat them with serious respect."

La Salle had explained the situation to the witch-men, and after long discussions to give the matter an air of extreme importance, they finally decided that it would be possible to give charms which would put all the devils to confusion. La Salle paid for the charms.

Marugi, knowing that one of his canoes full of skilled rowers could shoot the passage —both in and out—easily enough, selected twenty men and the smallest war-boat.

La Salle's "boy," who cooked for him and acted as guide in his rambles, was one of the natives that had been returned from the plantation with Marugi; a very intelligent fellow who had picked up a bit English, and who showed an angle of his character by throwing away the charm which had been supplied him.

"Me fellow belong you," he said to La Salle. "Debil hurt me, you hurt debil. My word! Debil no fool to get himself hurt!"

La Salle called him "Tam." His name was Tamako. He was a young man of about twenty years. The ambition of his life was to own a rifle and a white man's head.

At this time in New Georgia firearms were almost unknown among the natives. A few old muskets were scattered here and there among the beach villages, with the outside of the barrels scraped and highly polished while the inside rusted.

Over bamboo rollers the canoe was run from the boat-house, which sat almost a hundred yards back from the beach so that raiders could not steal down and readily make off with the war-boats. The boat-house was a long, high, dark building, open at one end with slots in the front of the roof to admit the high slender bows.

The canoe was run along-side of a coral-rock jetty. The rowers, La Salle and Tam, got in with half the village looking on, making comments and shouting. Provisions and weapons were piled in the bottom of the canoe, and La Salle took his rifle, revolver and shotgun in case they should meet with an enemy war-boat that was out looking for heads.

The canoe glided off smoothly as a serpent sliding over glass. The rowers took up a chant, rhythmically clicking their short, broad-blade oars against the side of the canoe between strokes.

The warrior dandy, Kivkto, steered, and Marugi sat beside La Salle.

Marugi was taller than the average native, broad in his chest, slender of waist. On his left forearm he wore a cuff of tortoise-shell that reached half-way from wrist to elbow. His ear-lobes, like those of all the men, had been pierced in youth and gradually distended until a pint tin can could have been passed through the loops. His flaring, black, kinky hair was bound with a string of cowrie shells, and thrust down into his hair he wore a bright tail-feather of a cockatoo.

As his father had been, he was expert with the bow and for that reason never used the wicker shield which was part of the Bakari natives' war equipment, most of whom fought only with club and spear. His face was streaked with lime; and as a blow from a war-club on the side of his head in his youth had actually thrown his face out of proportion, as if the club had left its imprint, causing one eye to be set higher than the other, his expression was terrifying. He had three wives. His bearing was proud, almost haughty.

La Salle smilingly admitted that when he first came to Bakari he was more afraid of

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Marugi than of all the other natives together; but he soon discovered that in this case the features were no index to the character, for Marugi would do almost anything that he thought La Salle wanted; and La Salle had found him unusually intelligent with a faithful regard for anything that he promised. But just the same Marugi was inclined to be morose, with a ferocious lust for heads. As the chief of a warlike tribe he could maintain his prestige only by being the greatest fighter, as his father had been.

IV

I JUDGE (La Salle continued) that it was a little after nine o'clock when we started. I had given my watch to Ngora, as I had lost all interest in time, and the old fellow was greatly pleased. He believed the thing was alive. Marugi had calculated that the tide would be right for entering when we arrived; and he seemed to be right, though—I think it took us about three hours—when I saw the great seas boiling up against the cliffs and throwing their spray mast-high, I was sure that he had made a mistake and that this was not a good time for attempting the passage. But I said nothing, and looked as brave as I could, which I fear wasn't very brave if the expression on my face was anything like the crinkling sensation in my toes.

As we approached Marugi pointed ahead at what appeared to me to be sheer rock, and said—

"There!"

He then took the steering oar from Kivkto, who replaced one of the younger rowers, and everybody became as silent as a ship-load of dead on the Styx.

As we drew nearer I could make out the entrance, and at first it looked to be merely a crack in the cliffs, and this crack seemed almost veiled by the thick spume. As we came more directly before the entrance it widened, and I could see the waves rolling through like hills. It was exactly as if a great sword had sliced an inverted wedge out of the cliffs, which almost touched overhead and widened out at the water. The noise was like a thumping and poundings inside your head.

Of course, I am not used to the ocean. I am yet the rawest sort of landsman; but I don't see how anybody ever dared that entrance. Yet they did. More than you think.

The canoe came within easy pistol-shot of the island and at a word from Marugi the rowers lifted their paddles, and there we sat, bobbing up and down, and slowly drifting nearer to the cliffs. I could not imagine what was the matter. The men touched the water only enough to keep the canoe headed toward the entrance, and Marugi stared backwards across his shoulder until I began to think he was afraid devils or something would sneak up on him.

Then an enormous wave slowly rose up behind us, growing and growing until I was sure that in spite of everything we would be lifted and dashed half-way up against the cliffs. And just as we had begun to feel its lift, Marugi shouted. With a yell the rowers gave way. I gripped the gunnel. It seemed that we were flying!

But you have been through. You know what it is like. It is exactly as if you had been shot from a great bow, one that used a boat with more than twenty men in it for an arrow. Most exhilarating, in spite of the fact that I was just plain scared. I know now that it is safe enough, as safety goes in that sort of thing, for the entrance is wide and all deep water.

Marugi told me that the time he was there with 'Illum' he had climbed out over the entrance and looked down. Besides, it *had* to be deep water—for there was a ship in the lagoon!

She was badly smashed and lying on a shelf up against a wall of rock. The bay was quiet as a wash-basin. It always is, I understand, when you get beyond the backwash at the entrance. Outside all was a mad smother and thunder, and here the water was as calm as a mirror; but in spite of it being midday there was a shadow and chill about the place that got into my bones, though I was at first too astonished to notice that, for we all just sat there staring at the ship. There was no sign of life.

The natives began a babble that grew more and more excited. The whites of their eyes seemed suddenly enlarged as I have noticed it always does when they are excited. They were eager over the chance for plunder; but some of them, in spite of the charms that were dangling from ear lobes, or about their necks, were doubtful. Their voices when at all raised went ricocheting back and forth across those sheer cliffs in a way that made some of them uneasy.

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I waited until Marugi asked me what I thought—in which I was again following Captain Douglas's advice. I told him that the crew must be about the island; that they undoubtedly had rifles, and that if they found the natives on the ship they could pick us off from the cliffs as easily as if we were crippled ducks; and that—he had previously explained this to me—for some hours we would be practically at their mercy as we could hardly dare to leave until the ebb was well out.

I suggested that I fire both barrels of my shotgun to attract attention.

The natives discussed this vehemently for some time, and just as I thought they were about to get into a fight among themselves, everybody seemed suddenly satisfied, and Marugi said I was to shoot. It pleased Tam that I let him shoot, and he pulled both barrels at once—and was nearly knocked out of the canoe by the gun's kick.

"Him strong fellow gun," said Tam, not at all disturbed but very vigorously rubbing his shoulder.

The report was terrific, and crashed back and forth between the cliffs like the firing of a hundred guns.

Almost at once a man appeared on the deck of the ship. He ran to the side, and catching sight of the war-canoe filled with savages, he drew back in alarm and was just about to disappear when I stood up and shouted at him. This seemed to reassure him a little—not much, but he again came to the rail. The sight of the lone white man excited the natives.

They paddled slowly toward the ship.

"Stay off! Stay off!" the man yelled. Then, "Who are you?"

The canoe approached within twenty yards of the ship. The man stood half-turned, as if undecided whether to stay or run, and repeatedly glanced across toward the brow of the cliff. He was a villainous-looking fellow, with only one eye.

I told him that I was a naturalist and had come to explore the island; but if he knew what a naturalist was he did not believe me. He shouted at me—

"Are them savages to be trusted?"

Before I could answer he cried:

"Take me off, with you! I'll give you a hundred pounds to take me with you."

As he said it he again looked toward the cliff. Just at that moment there was a shout, and looking up I saw a man standing high above us with a rifle in his hand. The natives were excited and called on me to shoot him. He, too, was a native. Almost at once he was joined by another, and still another, until four or five appeared, all with rifles which they pointed down at us.

"Who are those fellows?" I asked the man on the ship.

I can't repeat what he said, and wouldn't if I could recall his words, for he cut loose with the worst string of vile words imaginable, ending up with "female pirate." He said the natives belonged to her, and that she was up there on the island.

"She kidnaped me on my own ship," he shouted, "and with a gun at my head made me run her in here—and how we got through, I don't know. But I want to get out! I'll give you two hundred pounds! They're going to kill me!"

Then I looked again up to the top of the cliff and saw a woman!

You can judge that right away as between that villainous-looking fellow and any woman that would hold a gun to his head and make him drive a ship through that mill race of a passage—my sympathy was with the woman!

A man's voice floated down to us, crying—

"What man are you?"

They had distinguished me from the natives by my clothes.

When you have to carry on a conversation at the top of your voice you choose the shortest words. I put my hands to my mouth and cried—

"Friend!"

But I don't think I was heard for a rifle went off, and every native in the canoe ducked; but the bullet had struck against the side of the ship, and the man on her yelled—

"They'll kill me."

He crouched behind a mast that had been snapped off, about three feet above the deck, as you snap a walking-stick. In plunging and rocking back and forth the masts had struck against the cliffs. Another shot was fired, and that too at the ship. This somewhat reassured us, and I could see the woman making the men about her put down their rifles.

The natives in the canoe talked excitedly, and anxiously looked at the passage as if about to try to go out. Marugi sat sullenly with his oars across his knees and stared at

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the people far above us. And Tam wasn't panicky either. I suddenly liked that black savage when he turned to me and said:

"My word! These fellows big fool. Stop along here, all right. They shoot white fellow!"

Meaning of course that the people on the cliff were not trying to hurt us, but the man on the ship.

A native came up to the woman and handed her something, which I then saw was a telescope.

I shouted—

"May I come up?"

They were doubtful about it, but after some talk in which I could see her natives gesticulating, the same man's voice called down:

"You come. No fellows come."

I explained this to Marugi. The natives with me protested with a wild quick jabbering. Tam said:

"You fellow go. Me fellow stop along you!"

That young cannibal was rapidly getting inside my heart. They were afraid that I would be killed, or would not come back to them.

Marugi said in his own tongue, which I have found has a certain dignity at times—

"If thou art not in Bakari when Illum returns, my face will not be lifted to his eyes."

And I understood, too, why even a savage like Marugi dreaded the eyes of Captain Douglas. But I was, of course, going. I took a note-book out of my specimen-box and, in case something did happen—for I did not want Marugi to be blamed—I wrote a few lines which I told him to give to Captain Douglas if I did not come back. Every man in the canoe wanted to look at that piece of paper, just as if he could read! They passed it back and forth, touching it as gingerly as I would touch the horns of the devil.

A man came half-way down the cliff and shouting to attract our attention, pointed to the landing-place. Two of the ship's boats were tied up there. The canoe crossed to the spot. This was a wide ledge, now partly under water as the tide was in, from which ran a steep trail that had foot-holds cut into it.

I stepped out into about two feet of water, and Tam began to climb out too, but he was caught by his friends. He made a big row. Hadn't Illum told him to go wherever I went? Wasn't it Illum that had returned him home from the devil-white-men that drove black boys to work with whips? What would he say to Illum? As for the piece of paper, that was for Marugi, not for him!

You certainly forget the color of a boy's skin when he talks like that. He nearly upset the canoe, but they would not let him out. He appealed to me. He made me think of a loyal dog when his master leaves him; and I like dogs.

I went along the trail, and felt like a fly crawling along the side of a house. A slip of the foot, and I would have gone tumbling heels over head; but I don't suppose it was as dangerous as it seemed.

Captain Douglas had warned me to use as much caution as I thought wise, but never to show any uneasiness—no matter in what situation. So I tried to appear as if used to climbing along the face of cliffs, and now found this a particularly easy one. Anyhow, I would climbed up a spider-web dangling in space to see that pirate woman!

About half-way up I came to the man who was waiting, and I nearly fell off in the moment that I forgot myself looking at him.

He was a tall, bullet-headed fellow with a hooked nose. He was slender, black, an aristocrat among savages, with a fierce expression of features. He carried a rifle, and had a long double-edged sword of shark's teeth and a necklace of shark's teeth around his neck. He was bare to the waist. Bracelets that looked like ivory were on his wrists and these clicked when he moved his arms. Around his hips was bound a wide strip of colored cloth, of some rich texture. Perhaps brocade. Just the sort of fellow you would expect to find in the body-guard of a barbaric princess. He looked at me hard, and said—

"Why you come here?"

I told him I would explain that to his mistress; and for an instant he seemed undecided about letting me go on. I could see that if he dared to have his way about it he would knock me off the trail; but he turned without saying anything more and went rapidly on ahead.

When I came to the top I found more savages just about like him, though there was enough difference to perceive that this one was their leader. There were ten of them—strong, fierce-looking fellows, with

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intensely watchful eyes, and gripped their rifles at stock and barrel with every muzzle more or less directly at me.

The woman, after staring at me, came from behind them though they were reluctant about letting her pass. I had expected a pirate woman, some sort of mannish creature—and I saw a very young girl. I can't tell you what she looked like. I can only tell you how I have remembered her, for I have thought about, even dreamed of, her repeatedly until she seems now almost as unreal as some sweet face out of a picture that has come to life in dreams. But the amazing thing was that she had all the gentle grace of a girl in a sheltered, cultured home. I was simply dumfounded.

She wore a short, plaid skirt and a loose blouse, and was bare-headed. Her hair was silken and black, and appeared as soft as the feathers under a bird's wing. Her eyelashes were long and black. But her eyes were a silver-gray. There was about her a strange lack of fear that seemed to be inspired partly by innocence and partly by an innate courage that would dare anything. It was absolutely incredible.

I said in tones that were perfectly awestruck—

"Who on earth are you?"

Then I came more or less to my senses, raised my hat and tried to show that my manners were not as bad as my appearance must have seemed, by explaining that I had come to the island not knowing there was any one on it.

She said in a simple way, without being at all friendly:

"The ship was wrecked when we came here, and my mother is very ill. But she wishes to see you."

"Have you been here long?"

"We have been here almost three months."

And all that time I had been living, you might say, almost in sight of them.

"Why," I asked her, "did you come to a place like this?"

"This island belongs to my mother. Will you come with me?"

"Certainly."

And I walked with her. We were followed by three of the savages, and the others remained on the cliff.

From what I could see of the island it was covered with a dense growth, though excepting the coconut palms, and these were not the largest size, there were no big trees.

We went about a hundred yards and came to a small clearing, at the edge of which stood a large native house, which I could tell had not been constructed long, with a thatched cover extending about ten feet out above the doorway. Here was a roughly-woven mat on the ground. A ship's mattress on a frame of small logs was swung like a hammock at one side of this porch, veranda, shed or whatever you call it. There were two chairs in front.

They must have swung things from the ship up the side of the cliff by ropes. I don't think they could have been carried up that trail.

The girl said—

"You will please be seated."

I sat down, and she went into the house. I could hear her voice, but she was speaking very low.

Soon she came to the doorway and spoke to the man who was the leader of her savages, and he went in and came out, supporting a woman on his arm, while the girl carried a pillow which she placed on a chair.

I stood up, of course and bowed. She was the sort of woman you felt like bowing to, besides being the mother of that girl. And there I was, in bare feet and had not shaved for four days!

I assure you that I could understand in a glance how this woman might have put a revolver to the head of that one-eyed ruffian and made him drive his ship end on end into a whirlpool.

SHE was rather slender, very erect and dark. Her face was rather pinched, like the face of one who has been for some time in pain, and she had a terribly disfiguring scar on one cheek. It ran from her ear almost to her chin. But there was something of beauty left still; or at least you knew that she had been beautiful not long before. She looked young, somehow, in spite of the scarred face and pinched features; probably because of the hair, of which she had a great deal, and it was every bit black. Not a sign of gray. Her eyes were dark and piercing.

I looked at her carefully, then and afterward—as carefully as I could without seeming to stare too much. Her hands were long and remarkably graceful, and I could tell that she had recently removed several rings.

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There was not a bit of jewelry about her. I saw that she was intensely doubtful about me, and that she had perhaps removed her rings so that my rascally instincts would not be aroused. But I had seen her daughter—I did not care a thing about her rings!

When she had looked at me for a moment she bowed slightly without speaking, and sat down. The girl arranged the cushion, then her mother said in French—

"Doris, I will speak to the gentleman alone."

At least she called me a gentleman; and I was just on the point of informing her that I understood French, when she said in English to the man who stood by her chair:

"Areko, you will remain. Send the others away."

But they had heard and at once started off. They were well trained, those savages. The girl walked away. I did my best to keep from following her with my gaze—and succeeded. Probably because her mother was watching me.

She then asked me to be seated, all the while examining my face with those piercing, feverish, black eyes.

"You will please tell me who you are, and why you came here?"

I told her that I was a naturalist, that I had been brought to New Georgia by Captain Douglas, who was a pearler and was friendly with the village where he had left me. That I had come to the island purely out of curiosity. That Douglas had visited the island a year or two before.

That fierce-looking savage stood behind her chair with the rifle-butt on the ground.

She listened to me watchfully, then asked about Captain Douglas. Was he trustworthy? What did I know of him? Did he drink?

I told her that I knew nothing of him, except that he had been kind to me, that I would trust him, that so far I had seen he did not drink.

I could see at what her questions pointed. She was thinking about engaging him to remove her from this island, where she was marooned, with not another chance in years of being taken off.

She appeared a little disappointed when I told her that I did not know where Douglas now was, though the natives had told me he had gone pearling; and that I had no idea when he would return.

At every pause I framed questions to ask her, then did not ask them. I waited, hoping that she would tell me something without being asked; though of course I wouldn't have gone away without trying to find out about her. Finally she said:

"Mr. La Salle, I am sick, and every day my health weakens. It will not be long before I am dead."

Of course I tried to reassure her; but she shook her head in a slight impatience, as if that was something of which I knew nothing and she did not want to be interrupted. So I became quiet.

"My boys believe that Captain Miller, the scoundrel you saw on the ship, has devised a charm that is killing me. That is why they shot at him today. They are very superstitious. They have been threatening to kill him for days. When your canoe appeared they connected it with Miller. At first he lived up here on the island, but now the ship is the only safe place for him. My daughter sees that food is lowered to him every day. He is a scoundrel, but I do not want him killed. His death would not trouble me, but I do not want any bloodshed, however remote, because of my daughter. Mr. La Salle, she is the most innocent child in the world, but I—I, Mr. La Salle, am the——"

She did not finish, but I knew what she had been about to say.

Then she asked if I had ever heard of Lania Du Beque.

"No, Madame."

"Or Willerby? Winston Willerby? Slade Willerby?"

I shook my head to each question. But of course I knew that she was Lania Du Beque from the way she had asked.

After a long pause in which she repeatedly closed her eyes as if thinking, she said:

"Mr. La Salle, I am forced to trust you. But I would not; I would die and leave my daughter here on this island, probably for all of her life with these savages that you see about me, if I did not believe that you can be trusted. And I don't know what even they might do after Areko here was dead. And you have seen that no man, no number of men, could come to the top of this island if any one wished to prevent them. That, Mr. La Salle, is why I came here—though I knew that it would be almost impossible to leave. I thought I could be alone with my daughter, safe, safe from all

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the evilness of the world of which she knows nothing, and I—I know too much.

"That was a beautiful, restful hope. But I am dying. And for weeks I have realized, and suffered. How terrible it will be for her to remain here, buried alive, cheated of her life, day after day, year after year; or finally rescued by some beast of a blackbirder or trader—so that it would be better if she were dead. They are about all that come down into these seas, and if one of those men should talk with her she would then discover what a shameful name her mother has borne all these years, and I would rather bear ten painful deaths than have her know that. To keep her from learning that is another reason why we came here to bury ourselves, and when I am dead——"

"But Madame Du Beque," I said, "Captain Douglas may return any day, before your sickness has grown worse, and you both will be taken on board his ship."

She smiled with slight weariness, and a finger touched the scar on her cheek:

"If so, your Captain Douglas would know me by that. It is like a brand. Every one who has been in the South Seas long, knows of Lania Du Beque and her scarred face. He would tell you my history. I have been talked of from Manila to Singapore. And when I am dead, and he comes, he will of course learn who her mother was, and tell you what is said of me in beach-shanties and traders' huts. Oh for twenty years I have been a notorious woman, and such is woman's folly—I was not shamed!

"I shall not tell you what is said of me, Mr. La Salle. You will learn. You will inquire of every one you meet until——"

"Madame, please!"

"Oh I am not blaming you. It is only natural. I was once proud of being talked of. But now, now the terrible thing, Mr. La Salle, is that men will expect the daughter to be like the mother was!"

"No," I cried. "No! Don't say that!"

"Ah," she replied, harshly cynical. "I know men. And to the type of man that is mostly met with down here, it would make no difference who the mother was if he had a girl in his hands. They are not all broken-down scoundrels like Blackbird Miller with whom Doris actually sailed *alone* from Australia to Fiji. And even he tried to speak evil of me, but she snatched up a knife and threatened to kill him. And she, Mr. La Salle, was raised in a convent and had hardly seen a knife except such as was used at the table! She was taught to believe that her mother was an angel on earth.

"I wrote to her. I made her presents. From year to year I devised excuses for not having her brought to me; and always I had intended to return to France and see her, make a home for her—then *this!*—" She touched the scar—"I was ashamed, for she believed me beautiful.

"I thought it was to be my punishment for a life that was not as it should have been that I was never to see my daughter whom I had sent to a convent when she was hardly more than a baby; and in a way I forced myself to be reconciled to that as a sort of atonement—but now I know that God did not mean I should escape, even in this world, so easily. One day she simply appeared on the island where I lived. Blackbird Miller brought her. She had given him the diamond out of a crucifix for her passage!

"You are a naturalist; you know how they say, 'Blood tells!' That knife! And then the fact that I—I, a little more than twenty years before, at sixteen, had also come from France to the South Seas, *alone*. I came because of a man that I loved. It was love, too, that brought Doris; but thank God it was not a man!

"Doris is seventeen, and her ideas of geographical distances were vague, though under the chaperonage of a Sister she had, as a part of her education that I was trying to have well looked after, traveled about Europe. This Sister, who had been her closest companion and teacher, died; and my daughter became desperately lonely, and her little heart ached so to see me that she simply ran away from the convent, sold some of the trinkets I had sent to her, and came half-way across the earth to her mother.

"And the first man she met on the beach after landing was the last man in the world I would have wanted to see her. Slade Willerby is the worst man and the richest in the South Seas, and one that stops at nothing. I have but little hope of heaven, Mr. La Salle, but if I did have, I would throw it away rather than see her married to such a man. The very day that Doris arrived he came to me, he threatened to tell her, and to prove to her, who I was. And

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he could—because—because—well, you will hear of it enough times; I may as well tell you—because I had been his father's—you understand."

I made a gesture of protest, trying to let her know that she should spare herself the recital of such painful things. But her face hardened, and with almost hauteur she said:

"Mr. La Salle, I am not trying to entertain you. Fate has shaped it so that you are to become the nearest to a protector that my child will have. I have no relatives. My father was an Englishman. My mother a Frenchwoman. I know nothing of either family; and they are long dead. My child will be alone—alone. And the curse of a dead mother will be upon your head if you betray the trust I am placing in your hands.

"I am telling you what I do tell you because I want you to know that in spite of all you shall ever hear of *me*, Doris Stanlea is the most innocent girl in the world! And of course you must be told how we came to be here; and above all things you must avoid Slade Willerby who at the very least will make her loathe her mother's name. Ah yes, but he will. He is that kind of man."

"Stanlea?" I asked, wishing to make sure of the name.

SHE closed her eyes, and spoke without opening them; and I am sure that the faint tremble I saw was a shudder as she said:

"Her father's name was Stanley. But never, never let her know that. I did not think about changing the name at the time, and the nurse who took her to France was a Frenchwoman and pronounced it Stanlea. I tell you this because you may learn enough later to guess at the truth. And she must never, never know! Promise me!" she cried, opening her eyes.

"Certainly. He was an unworthy man, I take it."

"He was hanged!"

"My God, madame! Are you mad, to say such things!"

"But I had to tell you, for you would have heard—and it is only I, *I*, who can add that he was innocent!"

"Indeed, madame, I will believe that!" I said quickly, for I was shaken with horror at the idea of that beautiful girl being the daughter of a hanged man.

"But ah, you shall hear it all; and it will be the truth. I am a woman who is slowly dying, and you shall be my priest, for I want God to know that at last, to some one, I have told what is true of Clive Stanley. He knew who was guilty, but he was hanged with closed lips!"

"Incredible!"

"But if he were alive—I say Mr. La Salle, if he *were* alive today," she cried in a strange, almost broken voice, "he should never, *never* know that Doris Stanlea was his daughter, for he would hate her!"

For a moment her piercing black eyes gleamed like the points of daggers in firelight, and I sat motionless and did not speak. I thought then, and I am now sure, that she was almost mad; and no wonder, if half she told me was true.

She said—

"But I must finish quickly, for I am very tired.

"When I saw that Slade Willerby was determined to have my daughter I knew that I must do something desperate and at once. I believe that I would have killed him but for the fear that a hundred people would have told Doris he was not the first man her mother had killed.

"I knew that I had to take her away—away from everybody. There was hardly a day to spare. Blackbird Miller and the old ship *Ballagat* was in the harbor. I took my jewels, what money I had, gathered my boys about me, took Doris and went on board at night. By morning we were beyond the sight of land. I had to keep that scoundrelly captain to navigate. I did not dare to go to any of the islands near at hand, for Slade Willerby would have soon learned of our being there, and followed. I could not go to Sydney, for I was well known; and that scoundrel Miller would have talked, perhaps had me arrested, no matter what bribe I gave him. San Francisco was too far—and he would have talked there.

"Then I remembered this island. I did not know its position—I only knew about where it was. Years ago I came here with Winston Willerby, who was always cruising about to see what he could find. He was a different man than Slade Willerby. We rowed in here from the ship—I was always making landings through the surf with him—and W. W. was a man who was not afraid of anything. He said:

" 'We will call this Lania Island, and by

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right of discovery it is yours. You deserve it—no other woman would have dared shoot that passage!'

"He was joking, but I remembered this beautiful isolated place. No one, I thought, would ever find us here. But as I said, I could not give Miller directions how to steer for it. So I told him to head for Willerby Island. That is around on the other side of New Georgia where W. W. had started a big plantation about the time we first came to this little island. I knew that by then following the coast down I would see this place.

"At the first island we stopped, after leavin' the Fijis to take on wood and water, Blackbird Miller told the natives to tell the trader that lived on the island that I was making him take us to Willerby Island, off New Georgia—and that the trader should send word to Slade Willerby. The old scoundrel got drunk one day and boasted of it. That is how I know. So we did not stop there, as I might have done; for the man now in charge has always been my friend—but I would never trust him with Doris.

"We came on here, and when the cowardly old scoundrel saw this passage he whined and cringed, and swore the ship would be wrecked and all of us drowned. But I took a pistol and made him take the wheel and I stood behind him; and I said—

" 'If you so much as let this old *Ballagat* scrape a rock as we go through, I will kill you!'

"He said that the tide might not be right, but the backwash would throw us on the rocks, that we could never get out.

"I said—

" 'That is in God's hands!' and I leveled my pistol.

"And we came through. It was terrible, but we came through. The ship was rocked and tossed until we were all thrown to the deck, and he lost control of the wheel. The masts were snapped by swaying against the cliffs. The upper-bulwarks were crushed. But we came through. We were spun around, swayed, tossed back and forth; but at last the ship was thrown to one side, and into calm water; and though she was leaking badly my boys got the boats over and towed her to the side of the cliff where she settled down on the shelf and is now tied to ring-bolts driven into the cliff.

"And when your Captain Douglas comes, promise me that you take my boys to their island. They are Kingsmill Island boys. Captain Douglas will know what that means. And you will be able to pay him well for all his trouble.

"Areko, my casket—the box!"

Areko went into the hut and returned with a leather-bound box, which she opened on her lap and held out to show me. It was filled with jewels. They glistened and shimmered; red, white, green and crystal.

"There. Though my child was far off all those years, I did not forget her. Not one instant. I put everything into jewels, that she might have an inheritance. But she knows no more of the value of these things than a little child; and almost any man would rob her. But you won't. No, you won't."

"Madame, I give you my word."

"And I believe it. I trust you. I believe there is in your coming the hand of Him who will watch over my daughter.

"But hear me now, and I am done."

She then lifted her hand and with a terrible look in her eyes, said:

"I swear to you that if you are false to the trust I place in you that I will break from hell to torment every minute of your life, and drag you back with me!"

"Madame," I cried, "your threat wrongs me! I have promised!"

"And I have finished," she said, closing her eyes, and leaning back weakly.

At a gesture from Areko I arose to follow him. As I looked back she was still sitting there, motionless, her eyes closed, the open casket on her lap.

I hoped to see the girl again, but we met no one, and there were only the savages at the top of the trail.

When I appeared the men in the canoe gave a great shout and wildly waved their paddles. They had grown alarmed that something had happened, and I would not return. I climbed down the trail and got into the canoe.

Then old Blackbird Miller shouted at me, begging to be taken away with us; but I told him that I could not do it. We stayed there in that deep-walled little lagoon for some time, waiting for the tide to be just right. If I had known we would have to wait so long I would have remained on the cliff in the hope of seeing the girl.

We came through easily enough, then just outside the men rowed and rowed without seeming to gain headway, while we

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tossed up and down; but at last they moved the canoe farther out, and taking up their chant struck for home.

"THERE, I have told you just what happened," La Salle concluded, "and do you wonder that I have been going about in a daze ever since, waking up at night and doubting my memory? And did either of you ever hear of Lania Du Beque, or Clive Stanley, or Willerby? I have really doubted the existence of such people. Is there such a woman as Lania Du Beque?"

McGuire sucked hard on his pipe and slowly looked at Delaney, who in turn doubtfully looked at him.

"Yes," said McGuire, "I believe I have heard once or twice of such a woman."

"Yis, Oi av heard the name a toime 'r two meself. An' thot Willerby—he's all she said ov him, an' worse."

Delaney gently laid his hand on A-Ina's head. She was asleep, lying against his leg, an arm thrown across it.

"I have wanted to go back," said La Salle. "But Marugi was busy preparing for that raid, and was gone two days. And though he hasn't refused to go to Kakarutu, he is evasive and makes excuses. The truth is—I can see it—that he and his men don't want to be at the mercy of those men on the cliffs. But now that you men have come, I think I really ought to go over on the island and stay. You will be here to tell Captain Douglas, and come with him. Supposing the mother dies. Think of that girl alone there with those savages!"

McGuire smoked in silence and said nothing. Delaney puffed on his empty pipe, forgetting that it was cold.

From the dancing-grounds shouts and laughter still came to them; and far off many dogs were barking savagely, perhaps at an alligator that lay motionless to attract them closer.

V

AFTER McGuire and Delaney had gone to the house which had been given to them they sat on their mats and talked until morning. They had spread mats for A-Ina in a corner of the room, and she had fallen asleep; but awakening after a time she sleepily came to them and lay down with her head in Delaney's lap.

They were silent for a while, each with his thoughts, for there was much to think over and talk about; then Delaney, seeing that she was again asleep, picked up the bottle of whisky and poured three or four mouthfuls down his throat.

Then he said:

"Dan McGuire, ye 'av' been the best fr-r-riend Oi iver had since Father O'Flynn sthopped dustin' the seat ov me breeches wid a cane, but ye 'av' done me a gr-reat harm for Oi 'm beginning to loike this little haythen betther than Oi should. How she can bay afther likin' me the way she does Oi don't untherstand."

"Don't worry. She's all right."

"But Oi 'm not."

"Send her over to the island with La Salle."

"Aye, ye 'av' br-rains me bhoy. Oi had not thought of thot. The sight ov these naygurs keeps her scared to death. She'll bay glad to go. Ye know, it's always been easy f'r me to bay a dacent man baycause womin niver loike me. An' now Oi 'd bay human as any scoundrel, but Oi can see ould Williams lookin' at me an' hear him say—

" 'Pat Delaney, Oi 'm done wid yez.'

"Ow yis, 'tis no shame in a man to be afeard when Williams spakes. An' when he comes will yez tell him who th' womin is thot's over there?"

"Not *I*."

"An' ye needn't think 't will bay me."

"It will be Williams' usual luck to be placed so that he has to save her."

"Luck," said Delaney. " 'Tis the hand ov the divil thot's pullin' ov the wires. He's got iver'body down in this off th' earth place what's next door to hell. The divil's a wise ould bhoy. Thot's why he made womin in the fir-rst place."

Gurgle-gurgle-gurgle said the bottle with its lips to Pat Delaney's mouth.

"An' Oi'm too good a Christhian, Dan McGuire, not to baylayve thot iver'thing thot happens in this wor-rld is th' work ov either ould Satan or God A'mighthy. F'r Oi'm afther askin' yez, how else could it happen? Tell me thot!"

CHAPTER III

I

THE next day or two the village was sluggish and dull from its festive gluttony; and for two days more it had to debate and hold counsel in and out of the *tambo* house about another trip to the

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devil isle of Kakarutu, as La Salle wanted to return and to remain.

Delaney, McGuire and La Salle, with A-Ina near by, sat on the reef where some men were spearing fish. A-Ina was playing with children; she had made friends with girls near her own age; but the thick bush all about the village, so full of shadows and darkness, never brighter than a cloudy twilight, made her uneasy; the strange men, that she knew were cannibals, with their painted faces and staring eyes kept her frightened. She would never go far from Delaney.

"I can't understand you fellows not being curious enough to want to make the trip over," said La Salle. "You know that really is what is holding the natives back."

"They'll come around," said McGuire, who had quietly had a few words with the witch-men that morning, and even more quietly slipped each a bottle of whisky.

"But aren't you curious?" La Salle asked in a puzzled intent way, looking from first one to the other.

Delaney suddenly became interested in a far-off bit of scenery, and McGuire began to have trouble with the drawing of his pipe.

McGuire and Delaney had already talked it out between them. Lania Du Beque knew McGuire by sight; she would recognize Delaney; and she probably did not believe that there were bigger ruffians in the South Seas than they. Instantly she would identify Captain Douglas, the pearler, with Hurricane Williams. From the time she saw them until she died she would probably keep making Areko promise never to let them take her daughter away. Even if she did not lose her faith in La Salle she would know that on Hurricane Williams's deck he would be helpless.

"Do yez think she knows thot Williams is Clive Stanley hisself?"

"I don't know. It's said that she does."

McGuire now thrust his pipe, stem first, inside of his belt and looking straight at La Salle said slowly:

"La Salle, I'll tell you. Captain Douglas himself is the straightest man under heaven; but Red here and myself have a bad name—a pair of bad names. And whether or not Lania Du Beque knows those names, she will distrust us. She will know that *you* wouldn't have a chance against a pair of ruffians——"

La Salle quietly shook his head, smiling in a slow, pleasant way:

"You have told me about A-Ina, and I have seen how you treat her. If anything should happen to me I know that you two men would look after Miss Stanlea; even better than I—at least down in this part of the world."

"But Lania Du Beque doesn't know it. And there are the jewels. They'd tempt many a man that would not touch a woman. She would be suspicious. She would be more than suspicious. She simply would not believe you, or at least us. Now I know. You think it over. You have seen how uneasy she is. If she caught sight of us it would throw the whole thing on the rocks. I am sure it would. Anyway, why risk it?"

La Salle was thoughtful. He resisted McGuire's objections, but in a way that showed he was influenced by them. Madame Du Beque might be distrustful. He did not believe her wholly sane.

After another two days of hesitation, enough natives were induced by presents and promises to man the canoe. They did not want to go. They did not like that passage. They did not like being under the guns of the savages on the cliffs. They did not like leaving La Salle.

He had been almost induced to take Tam on the island with him; but McGuire advised against it.

"He can't make friends with those Kingsmill Islanders. He is an impudent young rascal, and there might be trouble."

And A-Ina was not in the canoe. She simply would not go. At the first suggestion she howled and scolded, then flopped down with her face on her arms and kicked her feet. She would not go.

"She wins," said McGuire.

"Yis, they always win."

Then Delaney stooped and comforted her with the gentle lie that it was only a joke.

McGuire and Delaney now walked down to the jetty with La Salle. Tam followed, carrying the boxes that were to be taken.

"If anything should happen to us—and you can't tell," said McGuire, "and you want to get out of Eden, build a smoldering fire and keep it burning. Just build a sort of house with low eaves and no sides so the rain won't put it out. If any ship comes within fifty miles it will be attracted. But if it's anybody in the employ of Slade Willerby—well, I'd stay on the island.

"Red and I will stay on here at least a

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couple of months. And if Captain Douglas hasn't shown up in that time, well, we'll begin to think about leaving. We have a good little schooner there; and of course before we put out, we'll come over and take you off. We'll need sailors; and Lania Du Beque would sail with what Red here calls 'ould Satan hisself' if she had those Kingsmill natives with her. Some day you'll understand why we haven't offered to do that now. But I'll tell you this much: Mathers is a fellow that can clear Captain Douglas of—well, it's pretty serious. And we owe it to the skipper to wait."

La Salle regarded him inquiringly, but McGuire said nothing more.

They shook hands warmly at parting. McGuire had a strong liking for La Salle, who was quiet, pleasant, no coward and of fine appearance.

II

ABOUT the best way to get a bird's-eye understanding of Solomon Island savages is to think of black, unhappy children who murder each other, who have no sensation of horror except in the belief of the uglier nursery tales, who can kill without hate and die without fear—but have a terrible fear of being out in the dark alone; who are gluttonous, lazy, cruel and selfish; and who, like the mountain feudists of civilized countries, feel that a personal revenge is satisfied if they kill—not necessarily the person who has slain one of their friends—but any member of his tribe; who are treacherous as a cat's claws, yet capable of extreme loyalty, and though often bold will seldom stand up to a losing fight; who, without having the faintest conception of mercy will often treat their captives well, allowing them to live the life of the village apparently as free as anybody, yet will kill them without warning when a new canoe needs a head or a feast a victim.

They were the last of the South Sea people to feel the pressure of contact with the white man, largely because they lay outside his path and partly because during the past fifty years they cut off more ships than in all the other islands together; and for a long time practically every trader that came among them was sooner or later killed.

Such is the breed of the white race that the very news of the murder attracted other traders, eager to dice with the Devil—his life for a pittance of copra.

Persons whose study it is to know about such things say that at least two distinct waves of people have been thrown up on those shores; the second crowded the first into the hills, where they remain, still untamed and perhaps untamable. Until very recent years the bushmen and coast-dwellers hunted each other as men hunt game, pausing now and then with a sort of "King's X" to barter.

The coast-dwelling tribes were almost perpetually at war with one another, and seldom bartered as each had plenty of fish, salt water and coconuts; and, like the modern tribes of Europe, were at peace only when afraid of each other's watchfulness.

The coast-dwellers on one island often are different in appearance and customs from those on another; for that matter, those on the same island are often different from their neighbors a few miles off. But in an amazing, incomprehensible way, news will fly around the coast among these people, who kill one another on sight, as if sent by couriers.

III

DELANEY, being a true sailor, had to be working at something or other, and now feeling a strong proprietory interest in the *Jack and Jill* put in much of his time overhauling her gear. He did things with a rush and a stirring about, like a boatswain; when he worked he looked as if he were working. McGuire, in almost everything he did, had an air of lazy ease, as if he were loafing on the job. And the natives, being paid in tobacco, helped to careen and clean her bottom.

For many days life was easy and pleasant. They found time to swim and fish, to hunt ducks and pigeons with La Salle's twelve-gage shotgun, and talk with the natives who sat about them in the evening smoking and chewing betel nut.

McGuire had an understanding of native character, and an ease, that would have made his fortune had he been a trader; but he cared nothing for money. A little tobacco and a good deal of gin, a warm spot on the white beach, were about all that he seemed to want; but Delaney knew that he was without fear, and that in an idling, unconcerned way he would do anything, however dangerous; and that Williams, who

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was a thunderbolt of a man—in his harsh, silent, unbending way—liked and trusted McGuire more than any one in the world.

Twice Mathers had come to McGuire, whom he misjudged as the easier to move, and complained that he was afraid of his head, that the natives treated him with contempt:

"Which is bad to let niggers do that to any white man. It learns 'em to have no respect for us white men. Old W. W. al'us made niggers stand around humble-like. There's a bit of a quarrel between us, but I am a white man——"

"Are you?"

"You oughtn't to be hard on me. I've told you free an' open just what happened on the *Good Shepherd*. I'm —— sorry about that an'——"

"I'll tell you, Mathers; the next time a nigger looks at you in a way you don't like, you just knock him down—in W. W. fashion."

Mathers went off, grumbling curses.

A day or two later he had approached McGuire again, saying that he was starving on fish and coconuts, and that —— watery taro; that he ought to have some tinned-meat and a bit to drink. And he wanted somebody to cook for him.

"I'll speak to Tam about it. You've got something he wants, and if you give it up, I think he'd be glad to wait on you."

Mathers was interested—

"What?"

"Your head."

"—— you!" Mathers snarled and hurried off.

One day McGuire was sorting the pieces of a bottle he had broken, with a practised eye putting aside those that would do for shaving, while Delaney leaned against a palm-hole and between puffs and made sarcastic comments. A-Ina with some children was playing a game with little shells and pebbles much like the doorstep game of "jacks."

Marugi and several natives came rapidly out of the bush toward them.

"Something's up," said McGuire, discarding his glass, and, taking out his pipe, he lay back in an attitude of lazy unconcern.

A-Ina looked up in alarm toward the approaching natives, who showed excitement, and she came to the side of Delaney.

Marugi shouted as he drew near—

"A ship like thine is on the reefs and another ship fights with it!"

"Where?" McGuire asked, thrusting his pipe back in his belt and standing up.

"Far away, between the village of Laupa and the village of Teakumigo, who are our enemies. They gather in canoes and fight with the ship that is like thine; and men from the other ship are in boats and fight too."

Teakumigo was about thirty miles to the east.

"How have you learned, Marugi?"

"The men of Pau have heard."

Pau was the next village to the east of Bakari, and acknowledged Ngora as its chief.

"How long have they been fighting?"

"Since yesterday when a man had no shadow."

"From noon yesterday until—" McGuire glanced about him and overhead where the foliage obscured the sun—"about the middle of this morning. None of the men of Pau went to see for themselves?"

"Their enemies are many and white men in boats help them and have guns, like thine."

"Pat," said McGuire quickly, "it's Williams that's on the rocks! Nobody else would be putting up a fight against another ship—he would be only too glad to be taken off. The one that's after him it isn't a gunboat. It must be a Willerby ship! Willerby has two ships down here, and he's on one of them. Williams is cornered and he's standing 'em off. But with two hundred natives circling to board him, and white men with guns—we have to go *now!*"

"Williams on the reefs?" Delaney was doubtful.

"Loaded down with shell. That's a bad patch of rocks."

"But we go anyway. 'T will bay a good fight!"

"Marugi, call up your men. Out with the canoes. A ship like ours! It's Williams's schooner. Send word to all your villages to get out their boats and follow us!"

There was a great rushing about, a blowing of shells and shouting—and putting on of paint. They would as soon have gone to their death with their heels in the air, as on a war-party without streaking their faces.

McGuire and Delaney went on board the *Jack and Jill*, took all the rifles, and hurried back to where the great war-canoe was

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being launched. Tam leaped about, shouting—just shouting, and brandishing La Salle's shotgun, his own ditty-bag on his shoulder, filled with shells. Men flourished clubs, grimacing and howling.

A-Ina had been left on the *Jack and Jill*, with a girl of about her own age; and told to stay. She had promised, half-afraid of the strange bright glow in Delaney's eyes. He, making ready for battle, had hardly seemed the same person. War is the mistress of men.

But now Delaney felt a soft wet pressure against him, and a tug at his arm. A-Ina had swum from the ship and pushed her way through the excited savages, whose every face increased her fright.

"Howly Mother of Hivin!"

"I go too. I no stay. It kill me. I die. Oo-oo-ooh!" she wailed, her eyes pleading with him.

"Yez can't go!"

"I have fear to stay. P'ease p'ease you will take me!"

She threw her arms about his neck, but he pulled them away; and McGuire said to Tam's young brother, a lad of about fourteen who was trying to see everything—

"Here, take A-Ina to the ship."

When she saw that she would not be allowed to go, she stopped pleading, but with head down was led off.

IV

THE canoe held sixty men. Some on the south coast of the island held a hundred men and swooped down on villages on distant islands like black Vikings. The village of Bakari possessed three war-canoes, and each of the other three villages ruled over by Ngora owned one that would bear between forty and fifty men; and except for their sheltered position deep within the lagoon, and the name that Ngora and his son and his men had as fighters, they would long ago have been wiped out by the more populous village of Teakumigo, whose men—though they ranged far and wide—had become superstitious about attacking Bakari.

Twice they had slipped along the coast in the twilight and entered the lagoon in the dead of night with four great canoes filled with fighting-men—and stealthily entered an ambush. The last time one of their canoes had been destroyed by driving on to a reef. Its men were cut off, and the next day slaughtered.

The men of Teakumigo, after the manner of the islanders, gave the credit for their defeat to devils and planned no more raids on Bakari.

Now the great canoe sped on, twenty-five rowers to a side, chanting a wild war-song, and thrilled to drunkenness with the zest of the coming fight. It was McGuire and Delaney, and the guns, that gave them confident eagerness. The still water of the lagoon hissed from the paddles and boiled along the wake, and the colored grass at the top of the high stem stood out with rigid fluttering, like a pennant in a high wind. The rowers all faced forward, and the little wizened, monkey-like old Ghobau, with his single ornament of a crescent clam-shell on his thin breast, held the steering-paddle.

They quickly outdistanced the two canoes that followed; those from the other villages had not got away as soon, and had not even been sighted when the big canoe swept from the lagoon out on the ocean.

Marugi and McGuire sat side by side, and McGuire with patience and no excitement, talked steadily.

McGuire knew that anything like a pitched battle between natives was not a very deadly affair. An ambush, a raid, a surprize attack was murderous; but all that prevented the natives from extinction was that it did not take many deaths to decide a battle. There was always much shouting of defiance, a brandishing of weapons, a feinting and circling about, as if each were afraid of the other; as perhaps they were. It was more like a deadly game than a fight; they enjoyed the excitement, but were extremely cautious about getting the victory. Savage peoples all over the world fight much the same way until taught to rush headlong by the white man; and, getting more deadly weapons from him, they exterminate one another.

McGuire now explained a manner of attack that was as new to Marugi's conception of war as Napoleon's astonishing strategy was to the generals who tried to fight him according to the traditions of war as they understood it.

"Yelling is the thing for bush fighting, Marugi. Your enemy can't see your numbers, and it gives him fear. But on the water all the yelling your men can do won't make anybody think there is another man

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than they see in the boat. But he expects you to yell at him as he will tell you. And if there is no sound, it will be strange, and he will be afraid, his belly will grow weak.

"He will expect you to stand far off, and shout at him. To go in a wide circle. To run if his numbers are more than yours. But rush at him. No matter how many canoes come at you, drive at the nearest—and our guns will speak. His men will have to lift their paddles and take up their clubs and spears. Let your men keep to their paddles. Our guns will do the fighting. Our canoe, because its paddles will be always in the water, can turn and strike, and back and go forward when his is like a log because his men hold clubs and not paddles.

"Do as my words say, Marugi; and when this day is done your enemies will have fear of your name that the sons of sons yet to be born will speak with terror."

Marugi turned to Ghobau, whom he respected as a wise old fighting-man, and asked what he thought of it; and Ghobau said that it was good counsel.

V

A MAN who was standing up in the bow shouted. The rowers turned their heads. McGuire stood up, and presently as the canoe slid over a swell he saw the topmasts of a ship close in to land. A few minutes later he made out that she was a two-masted square-rigger.

"It's Willerby's, dollars to ringbolts! Mathers said there was a brig down here, and that's a brig."

A little later they made out dark spots on the water. Canoes—but no schooner.

The coast was ragged with tiny islands and reefs.

"Must be an island or something between us and the schooner. She was on the reefs, they said. She couldn't have sunk."

"He might 'av' blown her up wid some ov thot dynamite he's always got," said Delaney. "He wouldn't surr-r-ender!"

After a time McGuire said:

"That's what it is. You can tell by the way the canoes are circling. The schooner's in behind that fringe of islets."

They could see three large canoes and many of the small outriggers, used for fishing; but no ship's boat which would indicate that white men were on the water.

"There, one had seen us!"

McGuire looked behind. The nearest of the following canoes was a good mile away—

"Make for that fellow, Marugi."

The rowers had slowed down, anxiously twisting their faces around. The presence of so many canoes before them, some of them larger than their own, was alarming. Marugi stood up and spoke to his men. A babel of cries, exclamations, protests answered him.

"Who is chief among you!" he cried. "For you I will get a dog that is sick, a pig that is new born, a woman with shriveled legs to be your war leader! May a shark's belly hold such cowards! May a bushman's child kick your heads that are unfit for his father's rafters! May your hands rot from your arms!"

They howled in protest that they were brave men.

"Strike the water with your paddles! On!"

In silence the canoe leaped forward.

Another of the enemy's canoes had seen them and was making after the first, paddling furiously.

Delaney and McGuire crouched out of sight that the enemy might not from a distance be aware that white men—which meant guns—were in the canoe; and McGuire kept his knee on Tam's shotgun for fear that he would blaze away when the attacking canoe was two or three hundred yards off.

Marugi remained standing. The men of Teakumigo were yelling, like the savages that they were.

"Their distance is as far as from my father's house to the beach."

"And the canoe that follows?" McGuire asked.

"As far behind them as your ship to the landing-place of canoes."

"Won't ould Williams stare when he sees our mugs, me bhoy!"

"Shut up. I'm listening to Marugi."

"They are as near as the *tambo* house to the great fig. Let your guns speak to them!"

"Closer, Marugi."

"They are near, Maki!"

"Yes, I can hear 'em. How near?"

"Eight canoe-lengths!"

"A canoe is fifty feet, Marugi."

"Six!"

"Aye, that is getting close."

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"Four! Rise and shoot. My men grow uneasy!"

"Stand by, Pat."

"They have dropped their paddles! They seize their clubs and spears!"

The canoes being bow on, and coming together like race horses, the men of Teakumigo, in one of their great sixty-foot boats with nearly a hundred men, counted on a quick victory as they passed within stroke of clubs of spears; and a second canoe of theirs was close behind, paddling furiously, for it looked as though the men of Bakari were offering their heads for the mere taking. And they came on, with spears and clubs lifted, yelling in a frenzy.

Whing-ap! went Marugi's bow-string; and as he shouted, the starboard-rowers lifted their paddles. Ghobau swung his light body against the steering-oar, and the rapid strokes on the port side swerved the canoe at an angle, broadside, beyond reach of clubs.

The yell of anger at the trick that went up was changed even in the throats of the men to fright and terror as the guns opened on them. Tam fired almost pointblank. McGuire and Delaney poured hot lead into them; and men leaped from their canoe, diving and swimming for the beach—anything to get away from that spot, for the guns fired on them still though Marugi had gone on, setting his bow straight for the second canoe.

This, seeing what had happened, backed water, then frantically the rowers faced about, plunging at the water with their paddles. The stern being as sharp as the bow, it was easier for the rowers to change position than to turn the canoe, which is making the circle would lay itself broadside. But the canoe was large and heavy, the men were frightened; it took time to get under way.

Ghobau was a cunning old fighting-man. His thin voice snapped, speeding the rowers, calling to them like a coxswain, marking the strokes with a shout, until they went faster and faster, and faster than ever before in their lives, while the canoe began to leave a wake that curved like the clam shell on his breast; and amid the firing of the guns and the yells of the Bakari men—they could not longer keep silent—their canoe smashed bow on, broadside, against the chief of Teakumigo's own fighting boat. The broad eighteen-inch stem of iron-wood shivered it like a club on a dried coconut-shell; and the water became as frothed and full of splashing bodies as when albacore drive anchovies to the surface.

The men of Bakari yelled like demons, striking with their paddles—edged like wooden swords. But the defeated natives were almost as much at their ease in the water as fish, and scattered with long dives, making for the beach five hundred yards off.

It was all that Marugi could do to keep his own canoe from striking out after the swimmers, running them down.

Tam blazed away until the gun was too hot for his hands, then he dipped it over the side to make it cool.

As the canoe swung around, there was not an enemy to be seen who was not making off; and the brig too seemed ready to get under way.

"I wonder if—would she be leaving if they didn't have him?"

"We'll shure boar-r-rd if she has!"

"That fellow on her is trying to signal or something."

"He's desper-ately wavin' ov his arms."

"Head over that way, but keep well off, Marugi."

LOOKING back McGuire could see that their second canoe had come up and was engaged in harassing the now undermanned first one that had attacked. A big canoe, badly undermanned, is unwieldly and handicapped when fighting with one that contains even a fewer number of men; and in warriors these were now about evenly matched. The larger one was trying to get to the beach; and the one from Bakari, with the dandified Kivkto as its war leader manuevered to ram it, broadside; all the while hurling spears and insults.

Now as Marugi's canoe neared the brig a voice reached angrily across the water:

"Lay alongside! We want to talk to you, you fellows!"

"Ask him what he wants, Pat."

"Who are yez? An' what yez want?" Delaney roared through cupped hands.

"That's Williams—Hurricane Williams—over there! We paid these niggers to keep there till we come back. Come here, we want to talk to you."

"Yez go to ——!"

"Who are you?" the voice rolled with rising anger.

" 'T is Dan McGuire an' Red Delaney!"

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The voice on the ship shouted in curses, and presently a rifle *whanged* from across the bulwarks.

"A-wow!" said Delaney as the bullet struck within fifty feet of the canoe. "We'll spake wid yez!"

He opened up with a rifle. Tam banged away with the shotgun. The canoe, without the paddlers changing position, backed off, while three or four guns on the ship blazed at them.

"We're wasting time. Let's get on to Williams," said McGuire.

They discovered that the schooner was in a small bay, shut in by the reefs, but not on the rocks though she sat low in the water as if she had a leak; and no canoes were about.

"It's still the *Witch Girl*, whatever her name!" said McGuire with pleasure, as he recognized the craft, very long, narrow of beam and high-masted for a schooner of her burden. She had high bulwarks, which was also unusual, in her type, as many scuppers as a sieve has holes, and two low deck-houses. She was fast under ballast, could ride out a blow like a cork, but Delaney's phrase for it was—

"She pitched loike a flea on a hot stove."

Her hull was black, and she carried in her lockers a set of black canvas.

The bay, which was formed on one side by a fringe of islets, had on the other side only a reef that was awash, and through this reef were many openings.

As they swept into the bay it was late in the afternoon, and they saw a boat being lowered over the side. The work was instantly stopped and a moment later four natives appeared on top of the deck-houses with rifles in their hands. She lay with her bow toward the passage, and a man seemed to leap into sight and stand on the bowsprit. His hands were empty. He raised a palm above his eyes and stared toward them. It was Williams.

They were too far off to distinguish features, but those who knew him well knew him as far as he could be seen.

"Now Oi 'll bet f'r onc't we see the skipper shmile!"

"You'll lose," said McGuire with a slight touch of wistfulness in his voice.

Thinking it best to let him know the difference between friend and foe before getting too close, for Williams might take the rifle from the man whose head they could see over the rail below him—take the rifle and shoot, all in one movement—Delaney, who had a voice like a bull stood up and roared—

"Ahoy, skipper!"

A wild exultant yell went up from the schooner. Two of the sailors on her were Bakari men. This was answered with yells from the canoe, which bore down, and amid yelling and shrieking as if filled with demons, glided alongside.

Delaney leaped for the bulwark's rail and went scrambling over like a cat, McGuire beside him. The natives clambered up as if boarding her for loot.

Williams was bare-headed, naked to the waist, where a knife hung on his hip and a gun on his thigh. His skin was darker than a Samoan's, a leathery-black from wind, sun and salt water. His face was covered with a short beard that tried to curl, but was kept closely trimmed with a knife. Though not a large man, his strength was greater than that of any man McGuire had ever known, for he seemed to get it from somewhere other than muscles and weight; as a madman does; and this power to do anything, dare anything, showed in his eyes. He was a vagabond of the sea, an outcast, an outlaw; he had been hanged once, he would be hanged again if taken; and it was perhaps the bitterness of this that gave him a rigid fierce aspect. He appeared always tense and calm, which was a strangeness of manner that made people uneasy and awed natives who saw nothing of the white man about him; but white, or black, or brown, when they began to know him they began to feel a subtle respect that grew into a loyalty that nothing could shake.

There was in him a strength, a will, that seemed to defy men, winds, ocean and rocks, the Fates themselves, that had cursed him. It was as if these Fates had taken him, smelted and hammered him, until nothing remained but the sheer metal.

Williams now looked at his two men, simply looked at them. His eyes were hard as porcelain. He did not smile. The savages gathered about and became silent.

"We aren't ghosts, skipper!" said McGuire, trying to grin.

"I know it—now." He quietly took McGuire's hand. He took Delaney's. "I was told you were. I went to Upolu. They said you had put to sea in an outrigger, and a hurricane followed."

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"It did, lot ov hurr-r-icanes. We got used to 'em."

"You know about the *Good Shepherd*, skipper?"

"One of the reward notices is in my cabin, McGuire."

"At Kusaie we met up with a fellow bringing a schooner down here to Willerby's plantation. We came with him——"

"He come wid us, yez mean!"

"His name is Mathers. He's one of the three that boarded the *Good Shepherd*. He's over at Bakari now. Willerby paid for the job."

"That was Willerby's brig," said Williams, pointing sea-ward. "We beat off two attacks since morning. One last night. One yesterday. I would not have had trouble with the natives but the brig showed up. Fellowe was on her. Some of his boys are from Teakumigo."

"It was Fellowe that shot Bishop Johnston!"

Sparkles of white fire seemed to be glancing about under Williams' eyelashes.

"I left Savo when I heard that a brig was on the other side of the island, recruiting. He must have heard of me, too; and thought I would come this way, towards Bakari. I stopped in here to have a talk with the chief. He came on board, I made him presents. He understood that Bakari was a village of my friends. I thought I was about to set up peace between him and Marugi. Then Fellowe came off shore and gave them gin. When he saw that they could not board us, he knew I could not get out, so undoubtedly he was ready to hurry to Willerby Island for more guns and men, and meant to come back at once."

So there Williams had been, shut in; and instead of the native canoes giving him a tow out into the channel, they had turned enemies. His schooner was loaded down with shell, and his own boat's crew would have had a hard pull if left to themselves. They could not do it with a rifle in one hand and an oar in the other.

He now turned to Marugi and gravely thanked him, praised him, praised his men.

The other two canoes from Bakari had come into the bay, yelping, with dripping heads in the hands of men that stood up, with other heads in the bottoms of the canoe. The savages that had been in Marugi's boat looked envious. Theirs had been the great victory; their trophies few. It was bitter; for it is the man with many heads on his rafters who may tell great tales of himself. Like dollars in another not wholly civilized country, it does not matter so much how a man comes by them—if he has them, he is lauded, respected, considered as one of importance among his fellows.

The schooner—no longer the *Witch Girl;* but now the *Islander*—was hauled out into the channel, sail set, and she sluggishly ploughed ahead, along the coast.

The canoes raced home.

VI

LATE that night the *Islander* dropped anchor just inside the lagoon to wait for morning. Loaded down with shell Williams did not care to try the passage in the dark.

He would not have gone into Bakari at all, but he meant to throw his shell on the beach, leaving just enough for ballast, then head at once for Willerby Island, slightly more than a hundred miles off, for that was the last thing that would be expected of him.

Fellowe would naturally think that Williams had headed out to sea, lest the brig should return with armed boys from the plantation and catch him again at anchor.

On the way down, McGuire had told him everything that had been learned from Mathers; but he could not say, of course, whether Willerby himself was still on the New Georgian coast.

He had told him of La Salle's experience, of the woman and girl on Kakarutu, but not who they were or how they came there; and well past midnight, Williams, who seemed never to sleep, walked about the silent, dark deck. Occasionally he went forward where Soba, a Bakari man, kept the anchor watch, spoke a word or two, and returned aft, where he would stand motionless, looking at the blackness of the hills, crowned with jungle; then he would pace to and fro, wrestling with thoughts that were ever waiting at the back of his head, ready in night hours or day hours to fight with him, and struggle like the demons of madness that they were to throw over his reason and his will.

McGuire came on deck. There was no moon; only stars. He had been drinking. But McGuire half-drunk was neither unsteady on his feet nor with his tongue; his long body might seem a little more loose in

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the joints, and his sleepy eye would be brighter.

Williams turned and motionless, faced him.

"Skipper—skipper?"

"Yes."

A moment of hesitation, then:

"You—you want to know what's the matter with me? I'll tell you, skipper. I didn't feel just right, an' I looked in your medicine locker. I've been drinking. That's what's the matter. I said to Delaney, 'I'm going to tell the skipper,' and he drank half the bottle, that Irishman—more than half—before he said I ought to do it. It's that hard to talk about."

McGuire peered into the bowl of his cold pipe.

"Skipper? Skipper?"

Williams put a hand on McGuire's shoulder, gripping him, holding hard, staring into his face. Something was wrong. He knew McGuire well enough to know that. This wastrel, with a streak of gold and iron running through his lazy body, always avoided him or was silent when drinking—unless he had something to tell; then he drank to loosen his tongue.

"Out with it, McGuire!"

"On the *Heraldr*, skipper, when Brundage died with seven men at his feet and a sword in his hand, you told me—you told me then you had been hanged and that he was one of the convicts that saved you!"

"On, go on, McGuire!"

"Then you are, skipper you *are* Clive Stanley!"

"I am Clive Stanley," he answered in a harsh even voice.

"I knew it! I knew it, skipper. I hoped to God it wasn't so! But it had to be—aye, skipper, it had to be!"

Williams waited, his eyes hard, his fingers like the grip of a steel trap.

"That woman, skipper—that woman on Kakarutu is ——"

Williams' hand dropped away. His body stiffened as if turned to bronze. In the dimness of the night McGuire saw his eyes gleam like an animal's in the dark.

"—is— is Lania Du Beque!"

Williams did not move. The incoming tide roared on the outer reefs. About the ship the water lapped like the soft babble of a mermaid's child. With the gentle sway of the tide-blocks stirred with slight rasping in their shackles. The hull, gorged with shell, from time to time groaned faintly. Dimly as a dying echo they could hear the festive howling that rose from the bush about Bakari.

Then Williams spoke, his voice tensely even:

"You need not be afraid of that, McGuire. She has been punished, and the past is dead."

"No, 't is never dead! The damn past never dies! The girl, skipper—yours—your daughter!"

Williams' hands flashed at his shoulders, jerking him forward, holding him up, and he stared at McGuire with an intensity that drove all the warm whisky from near his heart, and left him cold.

"McGuire!"

"I'm drunk. I know I'm drunk. I had to be to say it!"

"It can not be! I have seen the grave—knelt there—put flowers there, McGuire."

"She lied to you, skipper!"

"I, I whom men call the 'Cannibal White' carved her name in the stone that's there. It was marked with nothing but wood."

"She lied to you, skipper. She lied!"

"She never told me. I heard from other people. I paid an old seaman to make inquiries. He saw the nurse. She told him. She showed him the grave. It can not be, McGuire."

"A mistake or a lie, skipper. They fooled you. That nurse—Frenchwoman?"

"English."

"A Frenchwoman took her to Paris. A convent."

"Doris is dead, McGuire."

"Doris is on Kakarutu! That's her name—Doris Stanley. The prettiest girl in the world, skipper. Innocent as an angel! She came to her mother. Slade Willerby was there. This is what happened——"

TO BE CONTINUED

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CAPTAIN JED SMITH, PIONEER

by Frank H. Huston

BOONE, Crocket, Carson and others of that ilk—for they were all of Scotch-Irish ancestry—have had their chroniclers, rechroniclers and even chanticlers since the first tenderfoot gazed with unseeing eyes and unhearing ears upon the illimitable West. The metaphor is slightly mixed, but it is a truism that the earlier comers saw more with their ears than with their eyes, and Time has made no or slight change in their descendants.

The name of Captain Jed Smith is rarely encountered in these effete days of gasoline and Pullmans; therefore this tribute, poor though it be, to the Columbus of the West.

Smith was a New Yorker, the original Pathfinder—his footsteps to be later followed by others who claimed the credit for his discoveries, appropriated his title and vaunted themselves as the Great Explorers.

He was a partner of William H. Ashley, alleged discoverer of Great Salt Lake in 1824, their headquarters being at St. Louis, Mo. In 1825 Smith led a party of some twenty-five of his men, all trappers or mountaineers, from one of his field stations on the Yellowstone, across what is now Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska, Utah and Nevada into California, his course being down western Wyoming, down the Humboldt—called by him Mary's River after his Indian wife—to Walker River, over Walker Pass into what is now Tulare County, California, arriving about July. Leaving his party in the Sacramento Valley, then a game paradise, in October he recrossed the mountains to the headquarters on Salt Lake.

Ashley withdrawing from the partnership, Smith, with M. Sublette and Dave Jackson, formed the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, whose feuds with the Hudson's Bay and North West Fur Companies are history. It was resolved to send Smith with a larger party to the Pacific coast.

Instead of following his old route, he, characteristically seeking new trails, passed farther south, reaching the Colorado River at a point not now determined but believed to be about where Fort Mohave is now.

Here he was attacked by the Indians, presumably Mohaves or Chimehueves, and all the party with the exception of himself and two others were killed. With his companions he made his way, probably by way of the Cahon Pass, to the Spanish missions, being thrown into the *calabosa* by the authorities. In January of 1826 he was in San Gabriel, later in San Diego, and shortly afterward camped near San José, where he received permission to join his first expedition on the Sacramento.

If his routes and those of the usurper of his title of "The Pathfinder" are compared, it will be seen that Frémont practically, as one old-timer remarked, "camped on Jeds' shirttail and eat the leavings of his camp-fires."

Starting for the Oregon, the Columbia of today, following the route later pursued by Frémont and at present by the railroad, he camped upon the Umpqua, where the Indians again waylaid his party. He escaped—and by a curious coincidence again with two companions—and made his way to Ft. Vancouver.

From here, in company with Peter Ogden, himself another New Yorker by birth but now a factor of the Hudson's Bay Company, he crossed the mountains by a more northerly pass, the first to tread the "Oregon Trail." At the headwaters of the Lewis River he separated from Ogden and proceeded south to locate his associates.

Once more and for the last time his ill fortune with the natives overtook him, for he was ambushed by them and was killed by an arrow on or near the Cimarron River in 1831.

Sublette, Wyatte, Wyeth, Bonneville, Bill Williams, Walker, that Nestor of pioneers, in 1832 and 1833; McCoy and Kit Carson in the latter year; Frémont, who usurped Smith's title as the Pathfinder, and added insult to injury by renaming the Mary's River the Humboldt, all followed in general the trails first blazed by Smith.

Carson, Frémont, Sacajawweah and other lesser lights have now statues, counties, rivers, cities, streets to perpetuate their memories. Even Pete Lassen has a volcano, very appropriately named for him; but Smith, who blazed the trail, is now forgotten, unhonored and unsung.

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A ROYAL REVOLT

By F. St. Mars

Author of "Handsome Is," "Queen of the Pond," etc.

AN ELECTRIC convulsion smote the yellow heap at the foot of the ant-hill. It was as if a ground-mine had gone off beneath it, so that it flew apart into five large, exploding, and very intense parts, to the accompaniment of noises, gruesome and terrifying, to match.

The heat down there in that natural oven of space, with the ten-foot elephant grass holding in the concentrated tropical sun on three sides, and the ant-hill baked to cement on the other, was indeed enough to set anything off.

But it was not the heat in this case. It was mischief, for those five parts of said heap were lions; each apparently earless, each grimacing with a diabolical snarl, each shooting from its neighbor as if each were a live wire, and each with all its eighteen claws and its thirty teeth "cleared for action."

Thus, then, it was: one second a heap, motionless, asleep—upon which a few flies settled. Next second, no heap, but five demon-inspired lions, husking thunder, fire, and brimstone, so to speak, at every one and any one, with every breath, and no flies settled upon *them*.

And what awful thing had happened? What indeed? Nothing, simply nothing. Nothing, that is, more remarkable than the fact that the raking, tawny-maned, tawny-bodied young lion, standing alone on the one side, had, while lying in the family heap half-asleep, begun to play with the ample tuft at the end of his grand old black-maned, dark-bodied father's tail. And indeed, what else could he do, he being a cat—though the king of the cats—and as deeply affected by the appeal of a bobbing black tuft as any domestic pussy would be?

The result, however, was terrific. Old mamma, young wife, sister, brother, father—all, in a flash, hurled apart, "fighting fit," growling, snarling, bristling, exploding literally, for no more reason than that father had boxed his son's ears, and the younger brute, like lightning, had retaliated.

For about a minute all five beasts remained just where their first waking bound had taken them, with backs to the center of eruption, looking round at each other and growling in voices that ran in tremors along the earth.

Then the three lionesses came back and lay down again in the sun together, still grumbling a little; but father and son remained eying each other with fixed, lowering brown orbs for another full minute before the old lion at length lumbered heavily to the heap and joined the sleepers.

The young lion lay down a little apart.

Now, all this may seem a matter of small moment to recount, but it is necessary. It was an omen, and it started things.

The omen was fulfilled that same night, when—in moonlight—which hunting lions hate—and while the great horned owls made haunted noises, and the crickets kept up a continuous "jazz band," and the hyenas made gruesome tragedy-sounds in

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the middle distance—the lion family crept up to a herd of feeding zebras.

According to custom the old lion delivered the attack, but, most decidedly not according to custom, missed in his rush. Then it was that, like some mighty projectile fired from a gun of the gods, the son hurtled past his father, caught up the startled zebra just leaping into its stride, and in a whirl of dust rolled over and over headlong to earth with his prey.

True, he took some time over the actual killing, twice as long as his father's clean single scrunch would have needed; but what odds? He was a proud lion in that hour. He mounted his massive forepaws upon the carcass, and with magnificent maned head erect gave challenge to the world in a voice of thunder.

His mother strode up, as was her right, and he gave place to her with purring wariness. The other lioness, too, was greeted with purrs. His sister also he met with affection. Then, heavy, ponderous head low, belly swinging, his father stalked in, and—was received with bared weapons and a sudden, quick, ominous growl.

For one instant only—as long as was necessary to draw a deep breath of amazement—the old lion paused, mighty forepaw suspended, between stride and stride. Then his baleful eyes turned green-red, and before a man could cry, "Murder!" he had sprung.

THERE was a sudden quick whirl of grass and dust; a shifting of heavy bodies round and round, quicker than eye could follow, a cataclysm of awful sounds and—the old lion was slouching back to the carcass. The young one was standing, rumbling volcanic rumbles, under a mimosa-bush.

The old lion fed majestically. He never looked back.

The young one did. Even when he had stridden fifty yards away into the moonlight he turned and looked back. And again, from a hundred yards distant, he stopped and looked back, and he saw the glint as of green lamps in his mother's eyes watching him.

It caused him to face round and take two, quick paces toward her. Then, however, he stopped, stared for some time irresolute and finally strode away into the night.

He never came back.

The omen was fulfilled. He was three years old now, and his fate was written beforehand. He had to go. There was no longer room for him and his father in that "outfit."

He could make love!

An hour later the others, as they still fed, could all distinctly hear him roaring against the distant thunder, in a reed-bed a mile away.

All night long he roared thus, getting farther and farther away as the dark hours dragged by; not the grand, reverberating rally boom of the lions, but the dry, angry bass thunder of the grown lion's challenge, which his father furiously answered. Till at last at day-dawn his voice was no more than a far-off, sullen rumble seven miles or so distant, scarce to be distinguished from the thunder among the hills or the nearer booming of a cock ostrich.

The young lion—henceforth Leo—slept in a reed-bed, after having swum the half of a swift river—and chanced the lurking crocodiles apparently—to get to it. He had not killed again during the night—being too noisy and full of fine, lusty pride and anger for any game, not deaf, to remain in his vicinity—but he must kill during the night that was to follow.

He learned that fact rather pointedly when he woke up two or three times during the day, and his anger had gone, leaving him empty. He learned also that he missed company, having never been alone before, and—this was when a rhinoceros got his wind, and, snorting terrifically, charged close past—that he must be his own sentinel now, as well as his own champion and companion.

The bats, like gigantic moths, were flittingly trying to keep down the preponderance of flitting moths, and the night-jars, with strange pennant wings, were skimmingly doing their best to help the bats that night, when Leo awoke, conscious of a strange, recurring chorus above the high, thin trumpet-call of the mosquitoes and the croaking of the frogs.

The wind was rising and the night cloudy, and on the lap of the wind came a melancholy, eternally repeated cry.

"Whoo-oo!" it wailed, as if lost souls were abroad upon the wilderness of night. "Whoo-oo!" and again 'Whoo-oo!" taken up and answered, bandied about, and flung back brokenly, sadly, unutterably

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lonely, rising and falling to silence, and breaking out again from several places at once, but always from the same direction.

Leo listened to it for a while, what time he cleaned his face like the cat he was. Then, leaping up, he flung out his grand, thundering, imperial challenge of power. The dry, dragging, harsh roars, slow and deliberate and insolent, broke into the mighty, short, explosive, grunting coughs that died away gradually down upon the tumbling reverberating echoes.

And—a crash, and a burst of whistling snorts among the reeds close at hand, told him that his pride and arrogance had lost him the chance of a feed upon waterbuck meat that he might have stalked.

LEO issued out upon the plain, where he learned that zebra-hunting, which seems easy when you have a mother and an agile sister to drive the striped horse up to your ambush, may not be so easy when you are all alone in the wilderness with your wits.

In fact, he wasted two solemn, stealthy hours at the game, mostly upon his belly; but beyond stampeding several herds, whose hoof-thunder sounded like a cavalry charge, he accomplished nothing more exciting than a bad attack of lost temper, and a tearing up of grass in his rage.

Thereafter Leo dug at a burrow into which he had seen an ant-bear dodge; but this hurt his claws and his dignity, and he soon desisted.

Following this, he executed one of those almost faultless stalks of which the cat tribe are alone capable. The end of it was meant to be a cock black ostrich "jugging," with his neck along the ground and invisible, except by scent, in the black night. The end, however, was a whistling alarm from a fiddle-faced sentinel hartebeest antelope, perched upon the top of an ant-hill—cats and most beasts seldom look up—which seemed to come from bang overhead, and a kick from the ostrich cock, alarmed just in time, which seemed to knock all the wind and the brag out of the lion.

After that Leo heard a serval—who is a leggy wildcat of the spotted persuasion—mewing to her young. He drove off the spitting mother with a rush, and found the kittens, hidden and helpless, among some long grass. Then he slew in sheer peevish temper—so mean a thing in so kingly a beast!—but forbore to eat, and dropped again, almost as if in shame. It seemed too much like eating the flesh of his own kind, and that, even in the mother of all the wilds, is the forbidden thing.

About two hours later Leo missed a high-velocity rush at a fairy-footed Grant's gazelle, after a well-nigh perfect stalk, because an unseen, but very much seeing, great horned owl gave him away, with an ungodly ghost-shriek, in the last half-second.

Leo wondered why he had missed, but he need not have done so. He had yet to learn that, though his mother and his own father had taught him the ritual and the complete course of his hunting craft, they could not teach him experience and cunning.

That, great Mother Nature alone could impart, as she was now doing; and Nature is a hard task-mistress. Wonderfully and inimitably she teaches, but her price is high, and her punishment for failure is—death.

It was about then that Leo began to take notice of the howling, which was of hyenas. It was then, too, that he fell a rung or two from his high estate.

The distant howling had become so persistent that it seemed evident something was afoot. "The executors of the wild" had gathered, and they do not gather for nothing. Therefore Leo turned the line of his slouching, sloping, loose, two-and-a-half-mile-an-hour walk in the direction of the lugubrious serenaders.

Once or twice he halted to roll—a habit of cats that must have a meaning—but as he drew nearer he increased speed to a padding jog-trot of some four and a half miles an hour—which is harder than it looks to maintain over that sort of broken ground.

The howls became louder and louder, horrible and more horrible; and then, in spite of the fact that the lion was, of course, approaching up-wind, when he was still at some distance, as suddenly they ceased as if they had all been turned off together in a trap.

The rest of the royal approach to that high, long-deceased rhinoceros—for that was the "attraction;" Leo's nose had told him long before what it was on the bill of fare, and even a human nose could not have

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failed to do so—was accomplished in an awed hush, broken only by an occasional sudden rustle that indicated a terrified hyena quitting his august path. But a procession of twin greenish lamps, continually recruited, fell in the king's rear.

And those were the eyes of hyenas, escorting, as their ungodly calls had led, the king to the banquet. They did not themselves rush ahead to feed first, those polite ghouls. They had not before fed. They had waited courteously. One wondered why?

Leo did not wonder. He was used to respect; but experience should have warned him that this was too much respect, even from the most cowardly—as also one of the most deadly—beasts in all the wild.

Leo strode straight in to the anything-but-fresh, but decidedly huge, carcass without even a preliminary prowl around. He was hungry after fasting six nights, and he was going to degrade his majesty by feeding upon carrion.

Then Nature called for her payment.

SOMETHING snapped in the dark—metallic, sharp, soulless and clanging—and Leo jumped as if he had stepped on the red-hot trap-door of hell.

Then he went mad.

It was nothing much, only just such a heavy, toothed gin-trap as they set for lions around a carcass—that was all. It was chained to a tree—which was a mistake; it should have been attached to a loose branch—and Leo, caught by a paw, suffered some agony each time he sprang to the four quarters of the compass and came to the end of his tether—for cats are very sensitive to pain.

He suffered in his heart, too. And he became in a second no more lion, but only cub, frightened beyond thought at he knew not what. His antics and his contortions were a revelation in terror; his growls and his ferocious aspect a revelation in lion.

But through it all his faithful escort, his lugubrious guides, had not deserted him. They were still there, the hyenas; the ranks of twin green lamps were ranged around in the night closer in than ever, extraordinarily close, within spring—but for the trap. Most certainly his escort would not desert Leo.

But till then it had been silent. Now it spoke. Nay, it did more; it laughed!

It broke loose into an utterly abandoned, crazy, rocking, reeling chorus of laughter—shrieks, groans, screams, chuckles, moans, yells, howls, gibberings, devilish, malignant, ghostly, utterly beastly, terrifying.

And Leo stopped his contortion act as if he had suddenly been turned into a stone lion, and he looked at that band of devils as a king might look at a rabble of nihilists waiting to see him killed. With his magnificent head up his incomparably haughty, aloof stare fixed them, and they seemed to shrink before him into the size of mere rats.

There is, indeed, no other beast that can look that way—as if at an ant crawling around the foot of his throne. Yes, he filled the bill all right as a representation of power incarnate, as no other living thing could do.

Leo, knew, however, that when hyenas laugh that way in chorus, they have, or think they have, something to laugh at. And he was the something to laugh at. He knew it. What a feed they thought they were going to get—himself, perhaps, included! It was they, so he seemed to think, who had led him, Leo, king of all the beasts, into the trap. Thunder!

In a wink Leo became all lion again. Rage seemed to surge over him at the thought. He crouched. Like a whirlwind he rushed. The chain on the trap clanked as it came taut with a jerk that would have capsized an elephant.

Leo spun clean round on his hind-legs, coughing, grunting, choking with fury, but he did not stop. The trap did.

He left it behind, shaken off, a contingency the hyenas seemed not to have expected, for he was among them before they could quite all fall over backward or sidewise to escape. And once he struck. And twice he struck. And a hyena died—blasted out of existence with each stroke.

And the others? There weren't any. They might never have been there at all, by the instantaneousness with which they had magicked themselves into nowhere. It was a light upon the ways of the wild, and the kingship of the lion in particular.

Leo paused after the slaying, a little disconcerted what to do next. The victory had been so easily won, the night so suddenly still afterward.

A faintest of faint rustles whispered in the blotted blackness of the thorn-scrub

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behind him, and—he turned, whirled about quick as thought and sprang to meet the leap of the lion that hurled itself upon him.

Leo must have detected in some microscopical measurement of time what was coming to him. To human eyes there seemed to have been neither time nor warning to think even; less to act.

THE two met, and fell together, the other lion on top. But Leo was almost as terrible, with his kicking, roweling hind-legs, when on his back as he was when right way up, and the enemy broke clinch and leaped clear again. He was back, though, pouncing with the lightning quickness of a snake almost, as Leo dropped his guard while leaping to his feet.

Leo, however, was not there. He had flung himself sidewise and now, rebounding, returned like a spent shell. The two went down in a frenzied heap, writhed fearfully, and flew apart. They were together again, however, with a roar that made the very earth vibrate. They had been growling and snarling all the time, but nobody can describe those sounds.

For a moment they locked, rocking, reeling, rending, then broke away and staggered back, earless because their ears were flat, tails lashing, eyes blazing, paws gripping and making passes upon the empty air as if trying to anticipate the enemy's next move. But that next move never came.

Both lions now stood in a pool of moonlight let down in a silver cascade between a rift in the clouds, and——

"Ah! That's better," said a voice, the voice of the man who had set that trap, and had shot that rhinoceros. "Now we can see you."

The heavy butting, double express rifle-report that followed proved it. It shattered the sublime edifice of the night silence and brought it all toppling down in a chaos of echoes, and it set all the hoofs of the thousands of antelope and zebra, 'way out on the plains beyond, stampeding in thunderous unison.

The other lion—he was a superb, black-maned old male—collapsed in a heap where he stood, got up again, turned round as if he were going to walk quietly away, changed his mind, spun about, and—charged at the rifle-flash like a streak of light.

In the middle of the charge he fell dead, rolling over and over and biting huge chunks out of the earth in impotent rage as the life was wrenched out of his struggling body.

Leo did not wait to look at his foe as he lay there, almost as if asleep, in the moonlight. If he had done so he would have recognized, perhaps, his own father; but perhaps he had recognized him already.

Only this is clear: Leo went as lions go, or are gone, when they wish to go or be gone—before one can realize that they have moved. In point of fact, he reared upon his hind legs, revolved in that position and leaped back into the night—all so quickly that the bullet from the left barrel of the double express, which should have hit him, hit an ant-hill half a mile away.

Then it was, as Leo trotted away through the dark, that he became aware for the first time of yet another lion, keeping pace with him, as the soft, whispering swish through the ten-foot elephant-grass indicated, though the beast itself was hidden.

Leo did not appear to take any notice for a bit, but continued going, rumbling out a deep growl occasionally as one or other of his several wounds came in contact with twig, grass or thorn, but never stopping.

At last, however, after going about half a mile he halted in a clearing, and with head erect grandly faced about.

There was a pause, during which a bush-pig somewhere near could be plainly heard rooting and snuffling. Then the grass parted, and out stepped a lioness, slim, sleek, and sinister. She was purring a little, and Leo began to purr, too.

He recognized her. She was the old lion's other wife, the young lioness who had joined the family party a few weeks before.

It would seem from this that Leo's father had trailed his son in order to drive him from that vicinity altogether; but that is wrong. It was the young lioness, who had deserted the others, that trailed Leo. Leo's father had only followed her to see what she was up to, and in so doing had been led to his own son—a fact which naturally brought about the fight.

After that? Well, Leo and his new companion went away together, to stalk the bush-pig.

They seemed very well matched as they stole silently through the moonlit tracery side by side.

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THE holes were loaded. The fuses, cut in graduated lengths to control the order of the shots, led down through the drill-holes to the potent pale yellow stuff tamped at their bottoms in the floor of the shaft. "Peaceful Dan" Kirby in the subterranean gloom methodically gathered his tools and left-over supplies into the battered iron bucket and climbed the ladder to the surface.

Dan's shaft was only the beginning of a shaft, a prospect-hole twenty feet deep—one of his many beginnings, some completed, some never finished in gold-fields in far corners of the earth.

He was lean and gaunt and sixty. Nine-twentieths of a century had Dan spent battering at the rock-ribbed vaults of earth in search of virgin gold. At Cripple Creek Dan would have found old-timers with whom he had mushed the long snow trails of the Klondike. At Butte he would have found broken men who had been with him, young and strong, on the deserts south of Sonora.

A wild evening was promised. Great banks of cloud were rolling up from the west. Sweet Betsy gulch was in deep gloom. The treeless, boulder-strewn point on which Dan was sinking his shaft lay under stern shadow. The green forests of pine and fir rolling back to the lofty Saw Tooths had turned black. Where Dan stood no breeze was stirring, but there were faint, eery sounds of distant rushing wind and ominous, rumbling peals from over the edge of the earth.

He set his bucket on the dump beside the hole and turned back to the ladder. His descent was arrested by the ring of shod hoofs on the rocky trail. It was Jim Bradley, young forest ranger, in khaki and puttees.

Bradley's face lighted with a smile of greeting. Though Dan's face, schooled to repression, would not relax, his gray eyes betrayed him. But he said only—

"Howdy, Jim."

"Hello, Dan, you unimpressionable old cuss."

"Wait till I spit these fuses, an' we'll go down an' git a bite of supper. You'd better bunk with me. There ain't goin' to be no fires start tonight, an' if any started today, you won't have 'em to fight to-morrer."

"Like to, Dan. But the sunshine this morning deceived me, and I hung my blankets out to air. I've got to get back to the lookout. Sorry. Haven't seen you for so long, and I have lots to talk about. I'd like to discuss with you just how far the element of chance enters into the mining game, reinforcing and detracting from the effects of good judgment in the choice of location and the part that mob psychology plays in booms. In other words, I'd like to establish once and for all just exactly what average income an energetic man of more than average intelligence can reasonably expect to realize in forty-five years of mining, if he doesn't talk much, has the reputation, possibly more or less justified, for shooting quick and straight, knows the other fellow's weakness in a trade, and

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knows how to take advantage of the psychological moment. And other things."

"Yeh, whatever that is. Been down to the city?"

"No. Went over to Glascoe Butte and trenched around a little fire. By the looks of that cloud, I might have saved myself the trouble. But I expected to ride back this way, so I brought a bunch of papers from God's Country. Some are pretty old, but any news is new if you haven't heard it. Read 'em and use 'em for wadding or wall paper."

He took a roll of old and some comparatively new Chicago *Tribunes* from his saddle bag.

Dan took the roll and laid it beside his bucket.

"Yeh, Chicago'd be a good place if it wasn't so fer from everywhere. Wish you hadn't of left yore blankets out. Like to have you stay."

"I'm coming over in a few days. I'm getting lonesome to see you." His horse went at a springy trot down the trail.

While Dan placed bits of fuse and left-over powder in his cache, he counted the six crashing blasts and heard the catapulted rock-fragments thud and rattle on the rocky point. Then he caught up his bundle of papers and hurried to the cabin. But one he left by accident lying beside the boxes of dynamite in the cache.

As he was putting away his dishes after supper the storm fell upon the cabin. The wind came with a roar like a hundred waterfalls. Deluges of rain, heralded by crashing peals, thundered on the shake roof and swashed from the eaves.

He seized the dishpan and set it on the bunk to catch a tiny stream of water that had found a way between two dry shakes. He stood facing the window, listening to detect other roof-leaks. An apparition came to the window, and vanished.

IF DAN KIRBY had been a child he would have screamed. If a normal civilized woman he might have fainted. If an average man his heart might have missed a beat and swelled in his breast. He was none of the three. The muscles in his body went tense. The slight infirmity that will fasten on any man of sixty, no matter how clean and natural his manner of living, left him.

One long step he made to the head of his bunk. With one quick move, sure and unhurried, he unhooked a belted revolver from a nail and with two steps placed himself out of range of the window. Then deliberately, with that deceptive appearance of slowness, he buckled the belt around him. He waited, his gray eyes narrowed and steady on the door. Dan didn't believe in ghosts or other supernatural things.

For one second a human face had been plastered against that square of rain-wet glass. Dan had seen a low forehead under the brim of a black felt hat, black eyes close together, chin and jaws a mass of bristling, blackbeard stubble. No description could portray that face. It might have come out of a primordial storm to a cave-mouth fifty thousand years ago.

The rain still roared on the roof. The trees thrashed and moaned to the lashing of the storm. The leak over the bunk, diminishing as the shakes swelled, trickled in the pan.

Dan heard none of these sounds. His ears in that chaos of sound were keyed for one as yet unheard. Then it came, a footfall on the stone before his door. A knock.

"Come."

He raised his left foot to a stool. He leaned forward in a careless attitude. His right hand hung beside his gun.

The door opened, and a man came in.

He was a great, slouching figure. Battered felt hat, mackinaw coat, soiled overalls and heavy, hob-nailed shoes were literally saturated by the rain. As he stood just inside the door, streamlets of water ran down and formed a pool on the floor.

"Howdy," said Dan without moving.

"Howdy. Some night. I'm half-drowned. Kin you put me up?"

His statements were obviously true. Dan answered the question.

"I reckon. Make yourself to home. I've jest et. I'll throw together a bite of supper fer you."

The unbidden guest dropped his felt hat hat on the floor like a wet dish-rag and stripped off his dripping coat. When he opened the coat, Dan knew where he carried his gun. Two buttons of his flannel shirt were not in use, and there was a bulge under his left arm.

"My name's Benson, Jake Benson," said the stranger, advancing and putting out a great hairy paw.

"Mine's Kirby."

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Dan gripped the proffered hand.

He filled the stove, moved a kettle and coffee-pot to the front and set on a frying-pan. Benson shoved a stool near the stove and placed his wet feet on the hearth.

Dan cooked supper. As he worked, he turned this way and that, but never was the dark man outside his range of vision. He watched Benson bolt the food with ravenous appreciation. In all his long experience few men had so awakened Dan's distrust, and those few he had not chosen for companions in a lonely cabin just after he had made a lucky sale.

They talked. Dan's part of the conversation consisted of answers to questions. The man perceptibly brightened after eating. He brought out his makings. His tobacco pouch was soaked. Carefully manipulating his book of cigaret papers, he spread them on the hearth to dry.

Dan declined Benson's offer to help with the dishes. When he threw the dishwater from the door his side was toward the interior of the cabin. He saw his visitor with a dry cigaret paper helping himself to a pinch of tobacco from the can on the table.

The rain had ceased. The clouds were running away before the wind. A great, pale moon sailed above. A few torn fragments of cloud, woven of silver thread, raced across the rain-washed sky. Sweet Betsy, the little creek, roared unfamiliarly, augmented by the rain.

Dan's code of hospitality was the code of the outdoors, where conventions just as binding as, but radically different from, those of the city prevail. It strained that code when the stranger asked the loan of his razor. That might have been a personal peculiarity of Dan's. He would give money away freely to friends and strangers alike whom he found in need. But he liked steel of a velvet keenness, and lending his razor put the edge in jeopardy. However, at Benson's request he got it without visible hesitation. And then, when the guest, brightening still more after shaving, talked freely, Dan spent ten minutes with hone and strop bringing back that velvet keenness.

"Glad to git them off," said the man as he washed the lather from his face. "Them whiskers don't enhance my beauty none to speak of."

Facing him with hone balanced on the tips of his fingers, Dan did not answer. He did not agree with the sentiment. The stranger was actually uglier with the hideous mask of stubble gone. The degeneracy and malformation of his lower face, with prognathous nether jaw and thick sensual lips, were starkly revealed.

Benson was not affected by Dan's taciturnity. He smoked cigaret after cigaret made of his own papers and Dan's tobacco, drawing the smoke deep into his lungs. It escaped in driblets as he talked. He talked much, indefinite as to dates and places. He was a tool-sharpener, he said, and an all-around miner.

They slept that night side by side in Dan's bunk. Kirby, sleeping lightly as a cougar, was wide awake and in entire possession of all his faculties, including knowledge of the whereabouts of his gun, at the stranger's every move. But Benson snored peacefully and obstreperously.

Breakfast over, the man signified no intention of leaving. He said he was footsore and with Dan's permission would lay over a few days and rest up.

"My board won't cost you nothin'," he said. "I'll help you out at the diggin's. I know the game, an' you'll find I ain't no slouch with a double-jack."

"I ain't got no double-jack," said Dan. "Done all my drillin' single-handed. But I reckon you can lay over an' rest up a day or two."

He had never refused a man shelter and a share of his grub. A refusal was not in his code. He wished now he had learned how to word one. It was wearing to be kept unceasingly on the alert, to feel bound to watch a man every minute of the twenty-four hours.

"Well, I kin help you muck out, anyhow. I know what it means to haf to climb a ladder ever' time you shovel a bucket of muck, windlass it up, an' climb back down agin. It's slow as ——, an' hard. A man needs a pardner on a job like this."

"No," said Dan, with finality in his voice. "I allus git along purty well playin' my game alone."

While he washed the dishes he heard the man turning the blower of his forge and smelled coal smoke. He swore under his breath. He had always sharpened his own steel, and habit in an old man dies hard. But twenty minutes later he knew Benson had not lied about his trade. He did know how to sharpen and temper steel.

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The stranger walked before Dan up the trail to the shaft. Dan under his calm exterior was literally fighting mad.

MINING was Dan's business. This particular prospect was his present business venture. His reasons for digging on the crest of the rocky point were his own—and his own vital business secrets.

He had come over from the Sumpter country in Oregon two years before and found Jack Harrison. Harrison was young and in love. Mining was his business, also. It had proven a precarious means of livelihood for a man who contemplated marriage. Jack had staked a placer claim in a gulch and named it Sweet Betsy. He had operated a pan and rocker here and there with indifferent success.

Dan had looked over Harrison's claim and found nothing to impress him of placer possibilities; but he had found something which Harrison, blind in his inexperience, had totally overlooked. Sweet Betsy Creek, midway of the claim, tumbled over a ledge in a bickering cascade, making a clear, sweet pool below. Dan broke off pieces of the ledge and had them assayed.

Then, led by something stronger than a mere hunch, he went four miles down the creek to where the gulch widened out into a little valley. Here he staked a placer claim. He found what he expected. It wasn't rich enough to be available to the pan, as the Nome Beach and Skookum benches had been, but the gravel had values if worked on a big scale by dredge or hydraulic power.

He let young Harrison in. Jack, with the enthusiasm of a hound on a new scent, left his old claim and fell feverishly to work below. Within a few months Dan engineered the sale of their property to a big company. They received a price commensurate with its value to men lacking the capital for proper exploitation. Harrison had taken his part of the money and feverishly hurried down to Boise to marry the original Sweet Betsy.

Dan had gone calmly back up the creek and staked a claim bordering Harrison's on the West. He built a cabin of logs and shakes with his own hands and against a future need put a little strong box, containing his portion of the money, in the wall.

At this point he requisitioned aid from Jim Bradley. Among other branches of knowledge on which Bradley had wasted time in school and college was mathematics. He had a slight acquaintance with the transit, gained one Summer with a civil engineering party. Dan borrowed a transit and furnished the practical mining knowledge; and the ranger took the incline of the ledge, establishing the place where it should come out on the rocky point, if it was a true vein with no faults.

Dan had started to sink. If he struck it where the calculation indicated, he would immediately have a property containing more gold than Crœsus' treasure vaults, with thousands of tons of ore "blocked out" —all the extent of the vein between the high point and the bed of the creek five-hundred feet below.

That cañon, which Sweet Betsy had been patiently cutting during the million years before she was named, wearing through the vein and washing the gold dust down to the valley—that cañon, for Dan's purposes, exactly corresponded to a shaft five-hundred feet deep. Such shafts can be, and are, sunk by men with infinite labor to determine the extent of veins.

Dan's shaft was nearing the depth at which he expected to touch the pay-streak. Any round of shots now might break into it.

If he struck it, young Harrison, according to the mining law of the district, had no title to the ledge in the creek. A placer claim can not hold a vein of ore; hence the lode would be open to location.

Dan was not planning treachery to his friend. Though the law disallowed it, he did not question Harrison's ownership of the creek-bed. He wanted opportunity only to establish to his own satisfaction that the vein was true; then he was willing to trade his portion of the placer sale returns for Harrison's claim, and open up the ledge as the law required.

There would be enough, not only for his own latter years, but also for Harrison and his Sweet Betsy, for Bradley and others of Dan's friends to whom he allowed claims in his fortune. But he didn't want strangers interfering and reaping the fruits of his labor.

The secret was safe with Bradley. The ranger was square, skeptical and tolerant, and wouldn't know silvernite from rhyolite. But with Benson it was different. He was a miner. And he was much more—or less.

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Dan walked up the trail behind him, fighting mad. A revolution was occuring within him. His code of hospitality was being disrupted. For the first time in his life he was going to invite a man to move on from his cabin. But it was hard, because he didn't know how to do it. Dan had all the instincts of any gentlemen, but he lacked finesse. He was as direct and aboveboard as a rifle-ball. He would tolerate a man if he didn't like him, and leave him strictly alone if he could. When he actually broke with him, it was likely to mean nothing less than a fight.

He was very much ready to fight now; but somehow he couldn't do all the starting himself. The man was being pleasant and companionable to the best of his ability.

Dan's workings were on the extreme crest of the point. There was three feet of rocky soil on the surface. He had sunk through this and put in one set of timbers. The solid rock below, increasing in hardness with depth, would stand. He had put in a square frame of hewn timbers resting on the bed-rock and rising three feet above the surface, and had driven down solid walls of lagging split from saplings. He had carried all the timbers up the trail on his shoulder.

Around the up-standing walls was the dump, shelving away to each side, so that the "diggin's" resembled a big doughnut. He had windlassed those tons of broken rock to the surface bucketful at a time, making a round trip on the ladder for each one. As the dump widened, he had used a metal wheelbarrow with a hewn board for a track to carry the muck away. Dan had wrought with the patience and indefatigability of an ant building a mound of sand.

Benson helped Dan muck out. The gas and powder smoke of last night's shots had cleared away. Dan went into the hole with keen expectancy. Daily he looked to break into high grade. If he found it in the shattered rock today there would be no drilling, not even mucking-out. But he found none. Benson operated the crude windlass, hauling up the buckets of muck and dumping them into the wheelbarrow. They soon finished.

Benson let down the tools. When Dan refused his offer to help with the drilling, he went away, saying he was going to borrow the fishing-rod and try for a mess of trout.

Dan worked steadily for four hours with the single jack and drills. Then the six holes were down. He went to the cabin to cook dinner.

He found it smoking hot on the table. A big pan of fish, fried to a turn, sizzled on the back of the stove.

"I made myself to home," Benson volunteered. "Know what it is for a man to come in hungry an' then have to cook. Mucked out a little, too."

He had. Dan's reserve melted at sight of the savory meal. Then it froze. His quick eyes swept the cabin. The simple arrangement of the crude furnishings were photographed on his mind. Benson had swept and dusted. He had moved things about, and he had not left them exactly the same. Perhaps it was only a slight change in the spread of the blankets at the head of the bunk, something invisible to the closest of unfamiliar observers, that redoubled his suspicions again. The cabin had been searched.

Dan walked directly to the wall, deliberately pulled out a shake that ceiled a wide space of clay chinking between two logs and took out a little iron box. He opened it with a key hung by a buckskin string around his neck and took out a sizable sheaf of bank notes, stuffed them into an old leather sack and into his pocket.

Benson's eyes glistened like a bear's at sight of red meat.

"Ain't you afeard to keep so much jack in your cabin?"

"Naw. Never got the habit of banks. I allus pay as I go in cash—or lead."

The big man did not rise to the challenge. His eyes shifted under Dan's direct gaze.

They sat at the table.

"Heading fer Silver City?" asked Dan.

"No. Why?"

"I was jest thinkin' it's a purty good half-day's walk down there. A man hadn't ought to wait till too late in the afternoon to start."

"No," Benson agreed.

But after dinner he made no preparations to leave. Evidently Dan had not been plain enough. It confirmed him in his lack of faith in methods other than the most direct.

"Goin' up to shoot them holes, now?"

"Yes," said Dan, and inwardly added that Benson wouldn't be there to help muck out next morning.

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After the next breakfast he would point out the trails that led each direction from the cabin and plainly tell him all the walking wasn't taken up.

Dan went to the powder cache. In his unusual state of mind he had left at the cabin the canvas bag in which he carried the dynamite to the shaft. On the floor lay one of Bradley's *Tribunes*. Dan wrapped six sticks of powder in the paper with the caps and cut a small roll of fuse.

Benson again stayed on top, letting down the fuse, powder, spoon and tamping-stick. Dan cut the fuses and spitter and opened the package.

He had fitted the caps on the fuse-ends, had slit the oiled paper wrapping of the sticks of dynamite and tamped in the loads. His eyes had become accustomed to the gloom. He picked up the paper to tear and tamp into the holes on top the powder. He had even torn the front page half-across, when a photograph caught his eyes, sharply arresting him.

From that page Benson's cleanly shaved, asymmetrical face glowered at him. A miner named Hank McNeil had been convicted of murder in Tucson, Arizona, a particularly brutal murder. He had led in a spectacular jail-break, made a clean getaway, leaving no trace. There was a big reward offered. The paper was ten weeks old. Dan took three minutes to read the item.

"Found some pictures of a leg show, ol' man?"

Dan glanced up. Benson's gorilla head and shoulders leaned over the mouth of the shaft.

"Yeh. Something like that," he said.

He tore the paper from the back pages, tamped it in and loaded the bucket. As the windlass creaked, he carefully folded the rest of the paper and placed it in his pocket. Benson removed the roller with its winding of rope from the windlass to protect it from flying rock-fragments.

"All ready," Dan called.

He spit the fuses in order, quickly igniting each in turn at the spurt of fire from the spaced slits in the spitter. The fuses hissed, a sound ominous as the warning of rattlesnakes. Smoke poured from the six jets. He threw down the spitter and reached for the ladder. It was gone. Benson was just drawing it out at the top.

"What the ——!" he yelled, startled out of his habitual calm. "Throw down that ladder!"

Benson's brutal face, framed in the square of light, leered at him.

"You hadn't oughter be so —— stingy with fuse an' cut 'em flush with the holes——"

He ducked back as Dan drew and fired with an incredibly quick movement.

The six fuses hissed their deadly warning. The shaft filled with thick, black smoke.

IN THAT moment, with less than three minutes intervening before he would be riddled with shattered rock as by shrapnel, Dan Kirby, who had often faced less hideous death without quailing, knew the meaning of fear. During the space of five seconds he was gripped by panic, in which his mind, stunned and impotent, did not function. He stooped and clawed at the holes, trying to reach the fuses which were already burning below the surface on their way to the detonators.

Then with a mighty concentration of will he commanded himself. He looked upward through the thickening pall of smoke. Two and one-half times his height above him were the first of the timbers—and safety. There was no hesitation, now. He braced his back against one rocky wall, his feet against the other, and began his race with death.

It was a Herculean task. Where speed perhaps spelled life it was imperative that he control his mad desire to hurry. Each inch he gained must be sure. A slip, even one, would be fatal. His eyes, smoke-stung, sought footing for his feet across the shaft. His hands searched for projecting points behind him. He struggled, strained, hung by hand and foot and the back of his head, and gained inch by inch. Sweat broke from his body, dripped from his hands, ran into his eyes.

Below him the smoke billowed, rolled and swelled upward.

When his hands grasped the lowest timbers it seemed he had been climbing for an age. Why hadn't those shots gone off?

From the bottom timbers he gained the top in two lunges and rolled down the dump to the wheelbarrow. Then the first shot went off with a deep-throated boom, jarring the air. He turned the barrow over his head and body, drew up his legs as far as he could and waited, strained.

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Before the first of the rock fragments had returned to earth, the other shots crashed at intervals of a half-second. Two came almost simultaneously. Pieces of rock, heavy and light, rained down. They rang on the metal just above his face. Light ones pelted his exposed legs and feet. He counted six reports, then waited as the rattle of the hail diminished. Then—

"Couldn't be too lucky," he groaned aloud as a heavy, jagged chunk fell upon his leg.

The pain was sickening, but it helped to steady him.

He lifted the barrow away, turned on his left side and drew his gun.

A slow minute passed before he heard Benson's heavy footfalls. They came from the opposite side of the shaft. Benson's battered hat appeared, his head, then his whole body. He stood beside the shaft, half-veiled by wavering shreds of smoke. Dan rose to his feet.

Benson's eyes widened and seemed to start from his face. His mouth fell open. He backed two steps, stumbling. It was not until the hairy right hand was thrust into the bosom of his shirt that Dan's gun spoke.

His hand shook as he slipped his revolver back into the holster. He tried to pull himself together. He saw the jagged rock that had fallen upon his leg lying near him. It was greenish brown, not the same kind of rock that had composed the floor of the shaft when he drilled the holes. He picked it up, touched it with his tongue and rubbed it against his sleeve. There were faint specks of dull yellow. His tremor passed as he felt for his pocket-glass. He broke the rock against another and examined it again.

Jim Bradley's voice called him back to earth. The ranger had stopped his horse beside Benson. His face was working.

"M-my God, Dan! W-what have you done!"

"You didn't git here soon enough or you'd 'a' seen."

"I—I saw you shoot."

"Th-th-h- —— you did! Th-th-then wh-wh-what are you askin' me fer?"

With the rock in his hand he limped painfully around the shaft. He bent over the fallen man. Benson's chest rose and fell. He ripped open the dirty flannel shirt, transferred Benson's gun to his own hip pocket and made a brief examination.

A nausea gripped Bradley. There was a red spot in the hairy chest on the left side, high up toward the shoulder. Blood was running out and making a narrow path that disappeared under the left arm.

"Is it a cat or a skunk that is supposed to have nine lives?" Dan asked straightening up. "This don't look like a cat. I pointed my gat at his heart and it went four inches high."

Bradley's face was pathetic. Dan softened.

He took the folded paper from his pocket.

"Why don't you ever read these papers from God's Country?" he asked. "Especially after payin' the unholy high subscription price, when you could git a good sheet from Boise or Silver City fer half that."

Bradley devoured the photograph and news story.

Dan condescended to an explanation.

"He pulled out the ladder an' left me in the hole to git blowed up. Knowed I had my money in my pocket, an' thought it would look like a accident, I reckon. He knowed that while the busted rock would bruise me up considerable, punch a few hundred holes in me, an' maybe injure me internal, the main portions of me could be excavated from under the muck.

"He wouldn't care fer the money-sack bein' a little bloody—if that newspaper story is true; he could wash it off in the crick or throw it away. But I disappointed him bad. I clumb out. Rubbed all the skin off my shoulders an' half the hair off the back of my head."

Bradley looked at him with a curious expression of admiration.

"You are certainly hard to worry. Yesterday I said your reputation was possibly more or less justified. Today I am sincere when I pronounce you a wonder. If you learned to keep your money in the bank instead of your pocket, you'd be perfect."

Dan chuckled aloud, a rare sound.

"I'm goin' to from this on. I don't want no more experiences like today's. One ever' day fer a month, an' I'd be as nervous as a forest ranger.

"Now, you kin do me a favor, an' earn half that reward. Need your horse to git that thing to a doctor—an' the sheriff. I need help. That piece of high grade shore jimmed me up. It come from the sky, an' I've been diggin' in the ground fer it. An' it's time I was in Boise, transactin' a little business with Harrison."

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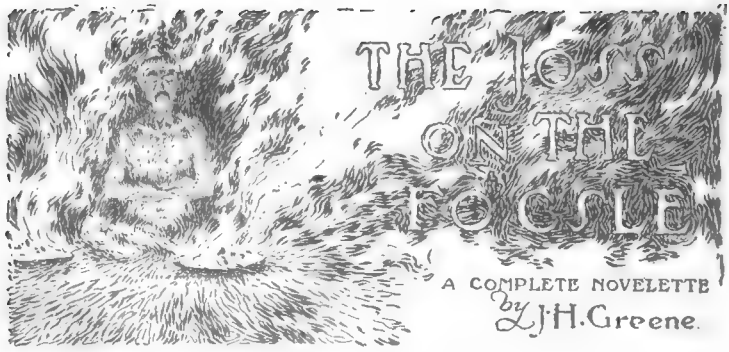

AFTER filling up off Japan, the *Jennie H.* whaler steered south into the Indian Ocean, homeward-bound. Captain Jerry Hackbutt grew sleek and less lantern-jawed, all hands were happy, for the lays would be big, and the New Bedford girls were hauling on the tow-rope.

But emerging from the islands she ran into bad weather and had to scud south and east under reefed topsails, and on the afternoon of the third day she was badly pooped, the water pouring over the stern, flooding the cabin and the captain, who had been stealing a nap on the horse-hair sofa.

He rushed on deck at once, followed by Mr. Higgins, the second mate, who had been in his berth.

The two met the cataract rushing down the companion, both knowing instinctively that the *Jennie* was broaching to. Captain Jerry found the untended wheel bucking to and fro in the narrow space between the two deck-houses. For the wheel was an old fashioned "knee-breaker," riding on the big tiller fastened to the top of the rudder, swaying with its motion to the imminent danger of the helmsman, who had to take the jolts on his leg.

More seas were coming over the low rail. Mr. Manson, who had been forward, was breasting them to come aft, shouting his orders in the teeth of the wind. But the helmsman had been flung to starboard, the spokes wrenched from him by the slams of the seas on the rudder below.

Captain Jerry did not stop to abuse the man, who should have held on till he was battered, nor his mate, who should have put two men on that wheel, but leaped at it himself, for the *Jennie* was broadside on, the big seas were shouldering her over, her mainyard dipped. She was turning turtle.

But her cargo saved her. The full tanks and barrels did not shift; the ballast of them dragged her upright by the keel. Captain Jerry was relieved by two men, and the injured man carried below.

That sea that had broken away the tiller from control had brought her bows round to the wind. There had been too much pressure on the after-sails, and all hands were called to remedy this, to make up for the the torn-away foresail, to slack the canvas aft, to get her running again. Captain Jerry looked along the deck past the trying-out kettles to the fore-peak, he could see the men straining at the halyards.

A white comber came over the bows, the peak did not lift enough, and a green sea swept the deck, carrying away a boat. The *Jennie*, under the pressure of the jib, lifted her head, and the torrent flowed aft, carrying splintered planks, oars, harpoons luckily sheathed, and lances, all floating on the water, a charming mass of deadly wreckage, as if the sea were trying to throw irons into the man attempting to master her.

Captain Jerry had just time enough to dodge the adze-like edge of a cutting-spade that seemed bent on slicing his blubber.

The wreckage was cleared; once more the *Jennie* was drawing, but the captain was anxious. For it was her big load that brought about the pooping; she was slow; she could not keep ahead of those

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monstrous seas astern. And the wind was not abating; the gray smother of cloud aloft was not thinning. He had not seen the sun for days. He was driving on a dead reckoning, and the night was coming on.

He talked of pumping out some of his precious oil to lighten his ship and slick out those seas, not as a seaman but as business partner of his officers, for oil was up, and he was anxious as they to drop his hook in New Bedford, with a full, even an overflowing, ship.

He went below to have another look at the chart, to con over his last observations sitting at the little table in the cabin just over the bucking, groaning, creaking wheel, the lifting seas that jerked the pencil from his hands, the deep hollows into which she dropped as the waters passed under her keel. He figured he would carry on that course till morning and went again on deck to have another estimate of the weather. He thought the wind was dropping and went below again this time to his berth that was to the starboard of the cabin. He threw himself all standing on his cot that swung on its bearings. Sleeping lightly, he was awakened by a hail from the fore-deck, and that he could hear it told him the wind was dropping.

"Breakers ahead."

In an instant the captain had spilled himself out of his rocking cot and was on deck.

OVER the wheel was a small after-deck bridging between the galley and a deck house used as a storeroom. The captain climbed to this and made out to the southeast, in the fading glimmer of breaking weather, the blur of low hills and the white of broken water. There appeared to be the opening to a bay, and a sand spit ran out under their weather bow. Manson had already started to wear her, bringing her head away from those breakers.

"Must be a strong current inshore, Mr. Manson," said Captain Jerry when he came down to the main-deck. "Set all she'll carry. Shake out those reefs and give her her royals."

The *Jennie* came round on the starboard tack, but the water was shoaling. The sounding said twenty fathoms, twelve fathoms, then fifteen.

"Shoals," said the captain. "This Australian coast sticks its toes out sure enough."

The next soundings were five fathoms, and the captain did not finish his observations, for the *Jennie's* bows bumped on bottom.

The shock threw captain and officers off their feet, big seas swept over her beam, pouring aft between the deck houses, but neither the shock nor the immersion had perturbed Captain Jerry's keenness of observation.

"Lucky she's on sand, Mr. Manson," he said. "That was sand, not rock. Pump some oil over those waves so that they won't break, and we'll lift over this bar. I see smoother water ahead."

The shock, however, had brought down the mainyard, and the deck was a litter of rigging and bellying canvas bursting with the impact of the waters. But the men cut it clear with axes and she bumped again, jolting the range in the galley and shaking all loose hamper out of the boats. The kettles jarred metallically forward; some of the bricks came away; the *Jennie* shuddered from keel to truck. But her captain did not.

"Sand, I tell you, Mr. Manson. She'll make it. I know these timbers. I saw them cut and laid."

The oil pumped over the side subdued the waves to sleek, sliding hillocks, smoothing out their surface malevolence, though not robbing them of their power to lift the *Jennie*, for she bumped again. The waters farther out were wind-whipped and foam-flecked; those around the *Jennie* rose with the treacherous calm of an undertow, of a tidal bore, of a deep sea swell.

She lifted no more; she was hard on a bar of a desolate coast. In that sea it was impossible to take anchors and haul her off. She was driving deeper and deeper into the sand.

"Pump her tanks dry, Mr. Manson," ordered Captain Jerry. "Overboard with every barrel."

The captain did not bellow. He was always quiet in desperate situations. Excitement was for men who did not know what to do, always a sign of inefficiency. But the mate was not sure he heard aright and repeated the order.

"Every barrel, sir?"

"Yes. We've got to save the ship. —— the oil."

There was a little warmth in the captain's words now, but it was the warmth of affection for his ship, for he was feeling her

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timbers strain on the sands below. Every timber and bulkhead, every knee and transom, every plank and stringer was complaining. She was now in danger, not merely the home he lived in, the shop he trafficked in, but something almost human, almost as near to him as his Martha in far away New England.

So, very soon, helped by a rising tide and a lightened hold, the *Jennie* rose clear of the bar into the smoother and safer waters of a bay, enclosed by low, bare, sandy hills. She was battered and unkempt; she and her crew were saved; but she was an empty ship. Two years toil in three oceans was given back to the sea as the price of their lives, and the comment in the forecastle was that the price was excessive.

Most of the hands were below, for, as they were almost in harbor, only a deck watch was set. Captain Jerry allowed that a rest was needed.

"I say he had no right to throw that oil over without consulting us," said Cain, a lumberjack from the Maine woods on his first voyage.

"The captain has the right to take any measures he think fit to ensure the ship's safety," said the carpenter, old Ben Moreton, oracularly.

Most of them knew he was right, for most were old whalers broken in to the laws of the sea, but Cain and a few of the greener hands kept up the long circuitous, childlike argument that steered in every direction and arrived nowhere. Therefore in the morning when the mate called all hands, six men were missing.

There was much to be done, and Mr. Manson had reason to be angry. He was the only man allowed to be angry on that ship. He strode forward and discharged a full cargo of his choicest vituperation into the forecastle.

"No more watches. We're wrecked, ain't we?" called the voice of Cain sleepily from below.

Mr. Manson stepped down into the forecastle.

He was quite capable of dealing with this mutiny single-handed. He had sledge-hammer fists; he wore heavy leather boots; he could bull-rush like a wounded sperm whale, and his fins were nearly as powerful. But the old manhandling days were going. Captain Jerry never allowed a man to be struck save in self-defense, and the mate merely stood in the center of the forecastle discharging barroom billingsgate calculated to get under the hides of the six men lolling in their bunks. On deck the rest had gathered round the scuttle to listen.

"Thar she blows," whispered Ben. "Thar's larnin'. He's a seaman, he is."

But the mate's abuse only had the effect of hoisting Cain's legs over his bunk.

"That's jest as fur as it goes," he said, unmoved to anger, for he knew that Manson's fists were lashed in by the captain's humanity. "We're nigh wrecked, ain't we? We're in port, ain't we? We've got nothing to show for two years' blubber-hunting. Do you think we're going to start all over again, going to Behring Straits again, slopping round the Cape again, messing round that sick African coast again? No, sir. We're going ashore, to make the nearest town, where they have to ship us home as wrecked sailors. We seed smoke this morning. There's folks ashore, and the worst ashore is a hull better than the best at sea."

"All right, my man," said Manson. "Each answer for himself. Who's willing to ship for another voyage? Wherever the captain pleases, as long as he pleases, with no favors asked or given? How many sailors are there in this forecastle?"

The mate's courage won three, who tumbled out and joined their mates on deck, leaving three mutineers in the bunks: Cain, their ring-leader; Finney, a little New York water-rat; and Holzer, a Pennsylvania Dutchman too slow and too fat to be of any use anywhere on deck or aloft.

In one way Manson would be glad to be rid of them. They had been that center of disaffection that is in almost every crew; Cain was a sea-lawyer, Finney a thief and a shirker, Holzer a lubber in the boats, endangering the lives of better men. But here was a dismantled ship to be put in trim, and these greenhorns could be made to put their weights on a line and row well enough to carry wood and water.

He met one of the boat-steerers amidships looking ashore.

"Want to desert too, Looey?" asked Manson, seeing there would be few officers and boat-steerers left to man the ship off that barren coast unless he could persuade the captain to hand out pistols and marlinspikes and drive the men in the good old way.

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For he was not at all sure even of the men who had followed him. Mutiny is a quickly spreading gangrene, and that coast at first sight was inviting. The low hills swam in a blue tropic haze, and he saw two lines of smoke rising from the low verdure. He knew nothing of Australia save its main ports; Geraldton was far to the South, and Fremantle still farther. Those white patches of sand might be the clearing of settlements, and none knew better than he how tempting smoking chimneys can be from a deck.

Looey, a slow speaking Cape Breton man, with arms like a gorilla's fit for the twenty-foot steering-oars of the whaleboats, had kept away from the argument in the forecastle. He and his mates bunked aft, near the officers, and were apart and above the crew, on higher lays, and, with the harpooners, were privileged men.

"Not me," he answered. "The ship you know is better than the land you don't. I knew two chaps deserted the *Clara* in South California, and when we put back into the bay a year after we found their skeletons on the beach and each man's knife fell out of t'other man's ribs. Must have drunk the sea water, we reckoned. Let these swabs go, our mess would say, sir. Their jaws are too much adrift aboard, and they want to look at the fish too much in the boats. We've had bad luck, but that's whaling."

MR. MANSON almost shook hands with this true son of the sea and went aft to report to his captain, but that officer was not to be found. He was not at table, not in the little cabin over the rudder, not in his berth, nor in any of the other officers' berths. The steward, who was clearing away, said he had seen the captain go forward on the lower deck.

The mate passed forward through the boat-steerers' quarters to the lower deck. The planks were slimy with oil spilled from the pumping. The big bulkheads and timbers were black with smoke from the trying-out kettles, reeking and shining with blubber and, with the light behind him he seemed to be inside the drive of a coal mine. He called the captain's name, but received no answer. He was getting anxious. Mutiny was aboard; Manson always considered that leniency invited violence, and the disaffected three carried knives and could throw them. He knew the force of Cain's argument to tired sailor men.

Manson had worked his way aft, had climbed in to his first ship through the hawse-hole, and the forecastle point of view was that the men were to be practically shanghaied into another voyage. Mutinies, like wars, always begin with little words, but a knifed captain might lead to a seized ship and uglier stains than oil on her decks. He called again and again, not too loudly, for a note of alarm might help to start what he dreaded.

"Hello! That you, Manson? I've been overhauling her timbers."

Captain Jerry, when alone with his mate, usually dropped the formal mister. The two had been boys together, and just now Captain Jerry was as happy as a youngster whose toy boat has floated for the first time. He had climbed out of a scuttle from the hold, and in the light of the lantern he was a gittering mass of oil and bilge.

"She hasn't started a nail or a pin, and don't know what leaking means. I knew it. I've seen those timbers cut and laid. Them bows have bucked arctic ice. I believe we'd have floated over without spilling all that oil."

"That's what the crew think, captain, and three of them are going to desert."

Not a word came from the captain as he led the way aft to his cabin, where in the daylight he looked like a statue made out of grease and decorated with smoke-stains.

"Hand me that chart," he said. "I ain't going to soil it for these swabs."

Manson reached for the chart from the rack and spread it on the desk.

"We're in a p'int or two off this," said the captain, indicating the northwest coastline of western Australia with a grimy finger. "I can't be sure till we take an observation at noon. But give me that atlas. This chart says nothing about the land."

A weather-worn canvas-bound atlas of the world with very little of the world and very much about the United States was opened for the captain at Australia. It showed a pink expanse with a few dots of towns round the south and east, but the northwest, where the *Jennie* lay, was blank, with no names, no river, no ports, only the inscription DESERT and a few blue patches marked SALT LAKES.

"I reckon the man that made this map in Boston didn't know much about these parts,

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and there may be little Bostons with bar-rooms and girls round here he has left out. But I never heard of them. All I know is that there is a pearling-station down here at Shark's Bay, five degrees south. If they prefer pearl-diving to whaling, I say let them go and be —— to them."

"That's what Looey says," answered Manson.

"Looey is a seaman. It takes a seaman to know the lay of the land. Call all hands."

"They're on deck, except those three. Can't I use a rope's end for once."

"Call all hands for shore. That will tumble them up."

The mutineers, who had been packing their bags, came on deck, and Captain Jerry was informed that all hands were waiting for him. Captain Jerry would not wait to clean up before facing them.

"Let's clean ship first," he said as he went on deck."

"I understand," he began, "that some of you don't want to sign on for an extension of this voyage and are going to desert and leave us short-handed."

"'Tain't desertion," answered Cain defiantly.

"Ain't it?" flared Captain Jerry. "I don't want any of your gab, you skrimshanking scraping of a scuttle-butt. I heard all I want from you just now when I was under the forecastle. It's desertion and mutiny, and I'm president, judge, jury and hangman of this ship, and you loose your jawing-tackle again and you go over the side to the sharks. No words; just hands up, all who want to go ashore and stay there."

Captain Jerry was magnificent in his wrath, and more so because of his grime. That harsh voice that barked from a face masked with soot and whale-oil, that little figure uniformed in muck, had so driven them when the kettles had boiled day and night, when the cressets had flared, when the seas had tried to tear them away from the carcasses alongside.

That oil-soaked, bilge-reeking skipper was clad in more than brass buttons and gold braid, and the only hands lifted were those of Cain, Finney and Holzer.

"Take the refuse ashore, Mr. Manson. See they don't try to take the boat. If they want to make port they will have to walk."

THEN Captain Jerry went below to clean up. In his trim little cabin, with its portrait of Martha, whom he would not see for another two years, he sat down to write her a letter announcing the failure of his voyage, with minute instructions to her how to get along, for the cottage in far-off Cape Cod had to be navigated as well as the *Jennie*, and over financial shoals worse than the Australian sand-bars.

The loss of the oil smote hard now he knew the *Jennie* was sound. Perhaps its sacrifice had been unneccessary, but he settled himself to a new course, to make for Fremantle. He needed boats, fresh stores, and he would have to see what he could pick up from brother skippers, what trust he could get from chandlers, whatever he could fish for in the troubled waters of credit.

He sealed the letter, to be handed to the first home-going ship, and then he heard the fall-blocks creaking as the boat was lowered, and the thump of the men's dunnage on her bottom.

His anger with the deserters had given way to a contemptuous pity and he sent for Manson.

"I've been looking at this map again," he said when the mate appeared, ready for shore. "That smoke they saw ashore may be settlements or may be not. But no settlers have put off to us, and that map says deserts and salt lakes. None of these swabs have ever been without a drink of some kind. Don't let them go without some bread and water. And you might let them have one of your pistols. But hold on to the other one till they are out of range."

The deserters were becoming impatient. If they had numbered more they might have tried to overpower the boat-crew. The blue haze over the land was tempting with tropical indolence, and they saw it through their South Sea memories.

"You don't think we're going to lug that," cried Cain, when a small barrel of water and some hard tack were thrown into the boat. "Bread grows on trees in these parts, and where there's lumber there's roots, and roots has to have water. We carry no dead wood. Put us ashore, or we'll chance the sharks and swim."

Finney squeaked his acquiescence, the

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Dutchman was content to be led to those green pastures ashore; Manson gave the word, and the boat made for the beach over a placid swell. The sandy shore opened at their approach and they entered it to avoid beaching in the surf.

They were in a small creek, banked by a thick scrub growing out of parched grass, and extending to the hills beyond. The mate gave them their choice of a bank to land on, and Cain took the right as he intended heading south. As the men stepped ashore Manson lifted some of the creek water to his lips. It was salter than the sea, though the boat was some hundred yards from the mouth, there was no incoming tide, and fresh water floats over salt.

"Better take this water, Cain," said the mate, pointing to the barrel in the boat.

But he spoke in his quarter-deck manner, the only manner he knew, and Cain, breast-high in the scrub, answered him with a free man's anger.

"I take no orders, Manson," he said deliberately familiar. "No more watches, boys, no more laying aloft on frozen yards. Three cheers for us, and to —— with the sea and captains and mates."

A derisive cheer came from the three, neck deep in that parched gray underwood that rose around and behind them like another sea.

"Captain Hackbutt told me to give you this," said the mate, handing Cain one of his pistols, but holding the barrel toward the deserter and keeping his other hand on his other pistol.

Cain took it without a word, and the three disappeared in the bushes. Cain could be heard shouting orders as dictatorially as any mate. Finney was singing, and the men in the boats had a glimpse of the Dutchman struggling with a bramble that had torn open his pack and ripped out a shirt. The fat fellow was too impatient to extract it from the thorns and left the pitiful garment on them, hanging above that sea of dead herbage.

"Flying a distress signal already," remarked the mate. "Just fools of sailormen, thinking there's a barroom and a snug harbor up in those hills. Push off in the bows. We need wood for the galleys and some of that fresh water Captain Cain is so sure of finding."

THEY returned to the ship in an hour with a boat load of dry, gnarled logs but no fresh water. The mate reported nothing but that scrub as far as he could see, with no trails, no signs of any settlement.

Some active hours followed to repair as far as possible the damage done in the gale, and to stimulate his shortened crew Captain Jerry ordered a duff to be cooked with the dinner. But he hesitated after he had tried the first mouthful of the delicacy.

"You didn't serve out any of that preserve that went stale, did you?" he asked the mate.

Mr. Manson had not. The cook was called and questioned. He was ordered to taste the duff. He admitted its strange, unpleasant flavor but protested he had made the duff according to the ancient and attested recipe of flour and raisins.

"Then it's the flour or the raisins," said Captain Jerry. "Maybe a rat got into the flour barrel. Maybe it's cockroaches. Dunno as they will hurt a man. Try another bite, Mr. Manson."

Mr. Manson ventured to think that discipline did not compel him to take that suggestion as an order. The duff was thrown overboard, and Billy, the cook, stayed aft in the galley, for the forecastle was waiting to make him eat their shares. Chips was of the opinion that a furtive attempt had been made to medicate that duff to keep them free of scurvy.

Next day Mr. Higgins, the second mate, and the captain went ashore to make a more extensive search for fresh water, and anything green that was edible.

But a further trip up that shallow, briny creek proved this coast offered no Polynesian hospitality. There were no yams in the sandy soil, no bread-fruit, no coconut-palms, only that same twisted herbage that seemed as if it had to writhe to live. Neither were there any signs leading to fresh meat. There were no birds worth killing; no animals broke from the bushes; a few snakes slid away in the grasses. But the crew were as little inclined to snakes as to rats and cockroaches.

They returned to the beach, and as the bay opened out they heard shouts and saw their deserters running along the sand. Cain raised his voice when he saw the boat, and Mr. Higgins ran the boat into the bank. Along the sand appeared a mob of bushy-whiskered, undersized black men. Cain

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made a sidewise leap as he reached the boat and a long wooden spear, trailing its butt along the sand, just missed him. The vicious weapon, a long, almost straight limb, but tortuous enough to seem alive, shot its lifted point along the sand as if it were a snake striking.

"Shoot—but over their heads," ordered Captain Jerry.

He and Mr. Higgins fired, and at the reports the blacks dived for the undergrowth, all save one, their leader, taller than the rest, who dropped an armful of those strange spears and with lifted arms advanced toward the boat.

"Don't shoot, Mr. Higgins," cried Captain Jerry. "By the Lord, he's white."

"And his spear is pointed with a white man's nail," said Mr. Higgins, lifting the spear out of the boat's plank, into which it had struck.

Its point was an ordinary ship's spike, six inches of sharp iron, bound to the wood by woven grass.

The native who was approaching was as hairy as his companions, but his skin was lighter under his uplifted arms, and his hair, though matted and dirty, was distinctly fair. He threw himself at the feet of Captain Jerry, uttering unintelligible sounds. He wore a loin-cloth of bark, his skin was dark with the sun and the stains of earth, but he was a white man, with a white man's regular features covered almost to his blue eyes with yellow hair turning white.

The captain tried all the languages he knew, but elicited no reply. The man appeared to be listening intently, and under his beard they could see him trying to repeat the sounds of the captain's words. But he recovered confidence enough to rise to his feet, and they saw he was very tall, big-framed, with no fat on his bones—an extremely muscular skeleton.

"I've heard of white men going native, but never met one before," said Captain Jerry. "This chap seems to want to go with us. All right, my lad, you're among friends, whoever you are."

Captain Jerry patted him on the shoulder.

"Why, he's as hard as teak. What a harpooner he'd make. But as for you, you scum, what brought you back?" he added turning to the prostrate mutineers.

They had been lying on the sand under shelter from the spears. Their clothes were in tatters. They were still gasping, exhausted, frightened, and Holzer had a bloody bandage round his leg.

"Won't they trust you in those barrooms up yonder, or maybe some one asked you to stand a day's work. Can't you speak? You had gab enough aboard. If them savages cut out your tongue, Cain, they made a better man out of you."

Finney pointed to his tongue, which was black and swollen.

"Water, captain, water," he managed to whisper.

Mr. Higgins held the water poured from the small barrel in the boat to the man's cracked lips, till at last he was able to speak.

"We've been on the run since we left you, captain, dodging them spears. Them savages had some kind of a war-dance last night, all painted up like skeletons and hopping round a fire. Don't leave us, captain. We'll do anything. We'll ship with you till you sink, but don't leave us."

The little waterside rat found his voice. It was like the squeak of rats, and the other two lifted their worn and exhausted faces, silently seconding him.

"You white-livered scum," said the disgusted Captain Jerry. "Three able-bodied white men frightened out of their miserable lives by the poorest niggers on earth."

"'Tain't the niggers, captain, it's the country—the dry, dead, empty country."

Finney struggled to his feet and waved a tremulous hand to the hills.

"There is no water you can drink, nothing grows you can eat, nothing to shoot at but little hopping dogs you can't hit. And beyond the hills there's nothing but sand, hot, red sand. It blows in your eyes and your mouth, and it's salt. Take us back captain."

"How about you Cain?"

"We're beaten, captain."

"And you, Holzer?"

The Dutchman was the last to recover his voice, but he had spirit enough to point indignantly at Cain.

"Yes. He said we'd have to draw lots, and he carried the pistol."

The big Dutchman, having recovered somewhat from his thirst, rose to his feet, his fat, foolish face vitalized with fear and horror. Cain also had risen and the boat's crew closed in on him, ready for any desperate move, for he looked like a trapped wild-cat.

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"Did you think he would kill you, Holzer?" asked the captain.

"No, no," sputtered the Dutchman, "He wanted to make me kill myself. He tell me yarns of shipwrecked, starving sailors. He say I can carry the gun. He want me to draw the short straw that way, to kill myself for him."

A low murmur of disgust arose from the crew. Some spat. It was as if this forsaken barren land had vomited forth an incredible monster. It was not the terrors of the bush and the desert that had driven them back, it was their fears of each other.

"Hand over your gun, Cain," said Captain Jerry.

Cain did so. The barrels were empty, he had used all his ammunition on the blacks, on the little hopping dogs, those small marsupials that had been too quick for him.

"Cain," said the captain, "you're not fit for my forecastle, you're not fit to turn loose among these poor niggers. A man that can't stand one day's hunger and thirst without talking cannibalism is not fit for shark bait."

A LOW, whirring drone overhead made all look up.

"Thought you said there were no big birds here, Finney," said the captain.

But before he could make any further remarks the yellow-bearded native, who had been prowling curiously about the boat, uttered an exclamation, leaped at the captain and dragged him to the sand. Captain Jerry struggled, but vainly, for the man's muscles were like a python's coils. When the men sprang to their skipper's rescue, the native released him and commenced wrestling with them all, but not viciously. He seemed to be wanting them to lie low on the sand. Captain Jerry, flat on his back, saw the blurred wings of some enormous bat pass close.

There was a cry from Finney, Cain fell with a cracked skull, and a curved piece of wood dropped beside him, dripping with his blood.

The native picked up the weapon, grinned at the dead mutineer and grunted out the word, "Boomerang."

"Don't hurt him, men," said the captain. "He saved my life; he means to be friendly; he's calling off his people."

The man had advanced toward the bush and was calling and beckoning.

"And he's a seaman too," said Mr. Higgins, "he can splice."

The mate displayed the piece of line the native had been playing with in the boat. He had started a bight, using the spear-point as a fid.

Dark forms emerged from the bush, and dropped their spears and boomerangs at a word from their leader. At the sight of the dead man bleeding on the sand they halted, fearing reprisals, till Captain Jerry took a harpoon from the boat, and threw it toward them, winning their confidence with the gift.

"Bury Cain and let's get back to the ship," ordered Captain Jerry.

The mate had already got his men to dig the grave some distance above tide-mark, where the water did not seep through, when the captain bade him pause.

Captain Jerry had been impressed by the mutineers' account of that desolate country, and he had been regarding the undersized, touzled-haired natives of it. Those in front no longer carried weapons, but the later arrivals did, and these were the long spears, the throwing-sticks they propelled them with along the ground, some clubs carved with vicious knobs of some wood as heavy as iron, and those mysterious and wonderful boomerangs.

The men grinned with fine white teeth out of their beards as they displayed these weapons. They were all very lean, very bony, but walked with a certain strut, and the man who had picked up the harpoon held it like a scepter. Women came, carrying babies in bark cradles slung from their shoulders. They were not pretty like South Sea girls, and one fearful-looking old hag carried a spear with what looked like a huge rat transfixed on the point.

"Mr. Higgins, we won't bury him here. We'll drop him over the side," said Captain Jerry.

The half-buried man was disinterred and lifted into the boat. The captain was surprized that the natives showed little interest. They did not even protest at their blond chief going with the white men. But Captain Jerry did not turn his back, or relax his grip on his pistols, till the boat was out of range of those spears and boomerangs.

The *Jennie* bulked big as they came near

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her, and her captain was eager to get away from those stark savages who shocked his sense of human dignity by daring to live in that barren bush, on those hills of hunger.

"All right, Mr. Manson," he cried to the mate's somewhat alarmed hail, for the shots had been heard over the bay, "Cain is gone, but we have shipped a new hand, and an able seaman too. See how he lays back on the oar."

The captain pointed to the yellow-haired, sun-darkened naked man in the bows, pulling the long oar with enjoyment and knowledge.

CAIN was buried that afternoon in the sea that had failed to make a man out of him. The new hand was given a berth forward, furnished with clothes from the slop-chest, and all hands tried to understand his speech, and to help him recover the speech he had forgotten. Fore and aft were reminiscent about similar maroons and castaways who had forgotten their tongues and habits and reverted to the primitive.

But that night at supper there arose another mutiny, this time starting at the captain's cabin, for the meal was atrocious. The meat was tainted, the coffee strange, the hard-tack had a sickly perfumed taste, not like jam this time, but unnameable and suspicious. A deputation came from the forecastle with the same complaint.

The captain had come on deck to investigate the galley. The cook could give no explanation.

"I don't seem to notice it in the galley, sir," he said.

But the men on deck did. Samples of the beef were shoved under his nose and he was asked what kind of Thanksgiving dressing he had served with their old familiar salt horse. He was given to understand that hard-working sailormen wanted to know what they were eating, wanted nothing foreign or fancy.

The new hand, who by this answered to the name of Towy, pushed through the grumblers and emerged from the galley with a piece of that firewood the mate had cut, which he thrust under the captain's nose.

"He has hit it, Mr. Manson," said Captain after he had smelt the wood. "It's that firewood."

Further investigation proved the firewood reeked with that strange odor. Bending over the stove, the mate said he could detect the smell of jam also, Captain Jerry made the same nasal analysis and received a whiff of some other strange smell. It was certainly the wood of that unnatural coast that had tainted their food.

Again Captain Jerry sampled the log Towy had solved the mystery with. That odor perplexed him and he handed the wood to Mr. Manson.

"Kinder drug-store smell. Seems to me I know it."

Old Ben, the carpenter, pushed through the arguing men, carrying two jack-planes.

"Will you please smell these planes, Captain?" he asked raising the planes to the captain's nostrils.

"Why in thunder should I, Chips?" demanded the astonished skipper. "Don't tell me that firewood has fouled your tool-chest."

"No, sir, but them planes is made out of sandalwood. That log Towy has is sandalwood; it's sandalwood has spiled our vittles. I ought to have known it, but whaling kinder spiles yer for fancy lumber."

Chips was a man of learning, so his explanation was accepted, and besides, Captain Jerry recalled old tales of the sandal trade, a trade more perilous than whaling, when islands had to be stripped and the precious wood fought for with fiercer natives than the desert tamed, sand-stunted blacks of Australia. He also remembered a fan and a carved glove-box he had once brought home to Martha.

"Why, you were with me," he said to Manson when they were once again in the cabin. "In Hakodate. You remember they were burning that stuff round a fat little idol, funny little chap with his eyes closed and his hands crossed on his stomach. Why, that wood is part of their religion. Say, I wonder——"

"What?" asked Manson sulkily as he again tackled the scented beef and the perfumed hard tack which Captain Jerry, to restore discipline and appetite, had declared was an Eastern luxury. "Just now you said it was a kind of sauce."

"It can be both, can't it?" retorted Captain Jerry. "I was wondering if it would pay us to fill up a cargo of this wood and trade it in Singapore."

"And have those natives scalping us with them wooden knives, cutting our heads off around corners, shooting spears you can't see till they hit up? What could be worse

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than that? Captain Hackbutt, I'm a whaler, I don't know nothing but whales, and I don't want to learn."

"Very well, Mr. Manson. I was merely considering, and a man who don't consider always has to take orders from him that does."

The mate was rebuked, and his captain retired to consider, for the whiff of the incense of Eastern gods had gone to his brain, and he turned in that night, wondering how he could find out the market value of sandalwood in Chinese ports.

But next morning he was sensibly recalled to his trade of blubber-hunting, for an empty ship was under his feet, he was short of stores and water, and the blue water was calling. He had a fair wind south, so the *Jennie* was put to sea.

Nothing more was said about the sandalwood, although the galley chimney still emitted the odorous smoke and the breakfast was the same Eastern luxury. The men were getting used to it as they had to whale oil.

Towy was put in the first mate's watch. He took orders with his eyes, was at home among the halyards and went aloft like a monkey. At meals he sat around listening to the men, making strange noises, forcing his lips to imitate what he had forgotten, and in return he taught the men the names and purport of the weapons he had brought with him. They learned to call the massive embossed clubs "*waddies*," the throwing-stick a "*woomera*," and also that Towy had skin like cowhide, that his bare soles could walk over hot ashes, that he could sharpen his spears with an ax, using his ankle as a chopping block.

THE *Jennie* made the offing and the yards had been hauled for the course to Fremantle when Captain Jerry heard an altercation on deck. Mr. Manson was in his berth, the voices were the second mate's and the deep jungle growl of Towy. The captain felt the ship come to an even keel, heard canvas flapping, and the compass overhead told him that some one had dared to alter the course.

He came on deck to find the *Jennie* had been thrown up in the wind, her yards aback. Towy was at the wheel easily putting it down with one hand, while his free fist was just as easily keeping off the mate and the man whom he had displaced.

"Towy has gone crazy, sir," cried Mr. Higgins.

But Towy did not appear at all crazy. He used no more violence than was needed to hold the wheel, and after he had nearly knocked the mate and the hand over the rail, he put his hand inside his shirt, drew out the piece of sandalwood he had first found in the galley—and again put it under the nose of the Captain.

Extremely puzzled but loth to use violence, Captain Jerry again inhaled that seductive perfume, though the *Jennie* was protesting against the interference with her sailing-directions, for she rocked uneasily in the long swell, her blocks rattled, her sails snapped like shots and she seemed smitten with the indecision of her captain.

"Wreck on the port bow," came the cry from the crow's nest, and all hands diverted from the queer confusion aft looked over the side to make out a black hull ashore.

Her masts were gone. She was broadside on the beach, and the paint was worn from her sides, the copper torn from her bottom. She was streaked with rust and stained with melted tar.

"I'm going aboard her, Mr. Manson," announced Captain Jerry.

"No spare spars on her, sir," commented the mate on this unnecessary curiosity; "she looks as if she had lain there twenty years."

"Look forward, Mr. Manson. I'll wager a hundred barrels of oil Towy came ashore in that ship."

Towy was wildly orating on the forecastle head in the only tongue he knew, waving the log of sandalwood as if it were one of his waddies, pantomiming some meaning as frantically as he knew how.

"He wants us to board her. Lower a boat, Mr. Manson."

Speedily the boat was pulling ashore with the captain and the mate in the stern. The derelict was seen to be a bluff-bowed, square-sterned brig, of a build that would have been old twenty years ago. Her name board was broken, and the paint gone. Two carved syllables "*Tek*" and "*—holm*" were legible but not very illuminating.

The boat was run up on the beach, and they found the shore-side of the hull deep in the sand and easily boarded. The stumps of her mast remained. She was no whaler for she carried no kettles. Scuttles and cabin doors were stripped of their hinges, the brass torn off the binnacle and

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the cabin skylight, and an attempt had been made to cut the rusted chains with something blunt.

"The natives," said Captin Jerry. "Now we know where they got the nails for those spears. I guess this has been more than a gold mine to them."

But there was no trace to her history, port or nationality, though Captain Jerry opined from some peculiarities of her build and the syllables on her name board that she was Swedish and from Stockholm.

When they came out of the cabin, where only the bulkheads remained, the officers found Towy excitedly endeavoring to get the men to lift the hatches. As the big heavy planks were lifted an almost stifling odor blew up in the faces of the curious mariners, and they saw the old hulk was packed to the deck with short, neatly dressed logs.

"Sandalwood," cried Captain Jerry. "Mr. Manson, we've got our cargo. We'll bring the *Jennie* in as close as we can, take it to the first port and see if the little fat gods will pay our price. This stuff has been in cellar a long time and it ought to go high."

By this time fabulous estimates of the value of this fancy lumber had spread fore and aft, and cheerily as if they were after the last whale to make a full ship the crew carried out the captain's orders, and the yellow logs piled high on the deck of the *Jennie* till they grazed the leach of her courses.

"She looks like a Maine lumber-schooner," said Captain Jerry as he found the familiar sweep of her decks blocked by the logs.

For they were not put below till her reeking hold received an unaccustomed cleansing.

"You see, Mr. Manson," said the captain sagely. "T'aint the lumber we're marketing, it's the smell. I don't think them little fat gods want their smoke served up with whale-oil and bilge.

Stowing cargo is the mate's job. Mr. Manson had been the man on deck for other craft than whalers, and he had handled perishable cargoes on other seas, West Indian sugars, coffees from South America, so he knew how to get this one to port undamaged. Barrels, tanks, everything pertaining to whale was shoved out of the way, and fresh branches were cut ashore so that the sandalwood did not touch the oil-soaked timbers of the *Jennie*.

By this they breathed, ate and drank sandalwood. They could smell it down the wind a mile away, and Captain Jerry remarked they would only have to open their hatches when off the coast of China to have the *Jennie* surrounded by traders in sampans, mandarins and priests bidding for her precious cargo. For they were all certain now that it was precious, that their luck was turning, that the loss of the oil had led to a treasure trove that might out price ambergris—that dream-gold of the whaler.

So they endured the extra work, the strange flavor in food and water. They made gifts to Towy, and even touched their caps to him. For all through Towy had behaved like an officer. It was he who put about to make the wreck; he had made them open her hold when they would have abandoned the wreck, and Captain Jerry only voiced the general sentiment when he gave the order that Towy should bunk aft with the boat-steerers.

"And he eats at my table. May be that will give him back his own language."

THE *Jennie* made good speed up the straits of Macassar till she was becalmed in a nest of islands. Captain Jerry changed his mind about Singapore, for he decided on making a Chinese port, dealing with the Orientals direct and avoiding all trouble about salvage. Besides, he there would be nearer his old whaling-ground off the coast of Japan.

"I'd like to find out all about Towy and let him have his share, but we don't want any underwriters in this," he remarked to Manson as they paced the deck in the darkening evening.

He had answered all hails from passing ships in his character of a whaler, but he had declined all signals to go aboard for a gam even when he met his own country's flag. For he had passed many ships, windjammers of all rigs and flags, steamers and native craft.

The land breeze dimmed the waters ashore, crossing the reflected hues of the sunset with shadowy streaks, and from behind a low headland, keeping pace with the advance ripples of the wind appeared a junk, heading straight for the bows of the *Jennie*.

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Captain Jerry heard a voice behind him, and saw Towy, stripped of his white man's garments, his hands loaded with his wooden weapons, and he was pointing a spear towards the rapidly enlarging lug sails of the junk.

"Just what I was thinking," said Captain Jerry. "Call all hands, Mr. Manson. Let these fellows see our force."

Though the *Jennie* carried no cannon, the officers had pistols, the captain had a smooth bore, the harpooners had whale guns, there were lances, harpons, cutting-spades, and axes for the men, so the decks of the peaceful *Jennie* presented a bristling appearance.

The junk came closer and her decks were seen to be crowded with yellow faces. Her high stern was swaying, her mat sails creaking as they drew. When Captain Jerry hailed her to sheer off for form's sake, the answer was a fusillade. One of the whalers was grazed, and the wrought-iron bullets rang on the kettles.

Every gun on the *Jennie* replied, and with better aim, for screams came from the deck of the junk. But still she advanced, her lugs rising like top-heavy towers, when Towy ran up on the forepeak and flung his boomerang as if he were projecting his weight behind its simitar blade.

Like a bat in the dusk it whirred across the narrowing belt of water, its reflection below like a shark's fin, till it struck the steersman of the junk in the neck. He fell backward into the sea, and Towy, a terrific and titanic bronze, chanting barbarously, stood on the bulwarks, throwing spear after spear into the packed horde massed to board the *Jennie*. The junk, deprived of her steersman yawed, and the pirates were terrorised. At another close range volley from the *Jennie* they were glad to haul away and scuttle off in the dusk.

There were no serious casualties on the whaler, and Towy was the hero of the action. But the big fellow was not satisfied. He tried hard to say something intelligible, and kept pointing to the disappearing junk.

"He's afraid they will return, and so am I," said Captain Jerry. "We are short of powder, but we've got the breeze anyway. Clap on all she'll carry."

Soon the *Jennie* under royals, stunsail, sped away from that nest of pirates. Captain Jerry had enough to attend to navigating those strange waters. He kept a double lookout, the lead was heaved continually, and he frequently consulted his chart, for the channel was strewn with islands. But he had an extra keen lookout in the bush-trained eyes of Towy, who climbed to the crow's-nest carrying the only weapon he had left, a heavy and brutally knobbed waddy.

It was a perfect tropic night. The waters sang under her forefoot, and innumerable stars made murder seem impossible, for the calm patch of the water, where the breeze left off was another heaven with its moving images. A dark level of land lay on both sides as they approached the exit from the strait, and the horizon began to lighten with the rising moon. Towy slid down a stay and began to whisper to the captain. The moon rose, a silver boomerang over light vapors, and as its sheen lengthened two triangular specks appeared right ahead of the whaler's course.

"Junks, by golly," said Captain Jerry. "We're trapped. If the wind holds we'll ram them."

Towy was waving a stick he had drawn from the galley fire. It was a sandalwood log. The smoke curled round the captain, who had already decided what to do. The breeze was freshening, the *Jennie* was carrying all her canvas, and he could rely on her timbers, which had bucked arctic ice and battered over that sand-bar. She ought to be able to crumple the frail sides of a junk. He had never examined the build of a junk, but he was sure junks were frail, something made of paper and bamboo, and he backed the Maine timbers of his *Jennie*.

But while he was giving his orders to his mate Towy kept waving that ridiculous burning stick at him.

"You'd think he was a Chinee himself. I wonder what the poor chap means?"

Captain Jerry, forced to fight for his life with a gang of cutthroats, was thinking hard, trying to use his every weapon, to invent new weapons to save his ship.

"Say," he drawled, "those pirates are all Chinese. How about letting them sniff our cargo. It's something to do with their religion. Maybe it would be high sign for us to slip by."

"They will only fight the harder," answered the skeptical mate. "They will want the wood themselves."

"Not if it's religion. There is always

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something even a pirate respects, something he won't steal. No matter how hungry you were you wouldn't take a coin from a collection plate, would you?"

Mr. Manson did not follow his skipper's thought, for Captain Jerry was trying to find the Chinese equivalent for his own New England conscience.

"I'll wager those poor wretches on that junk are scared of more things than we are. If we could only fix up the *Jennie's* figure-head to look like one of their fat little idols, but there ain't time, and her phiz was carved after my Martha. We'll haul to as we come abreast of the first junk and hit her amidships."

Towy held the burning log of that wood that had inspired so many of the captain's decisions under that officer's nose, and once again the perfumed smoke kindled the imagination of the whaler.

"Mr. Manson, turn the Jennie into a joss house," he ordered. "Pile the kettles with them logs and make them blaze. Let every man wave a burning stick like Towy here. Make them beat the ship's pots and pans and sing all their chanteys, only solemn-like. We'll try if these pirates will attack their joss."

THE crews of the junks, ready to board the *Jennie* on both her bows, beheld the moving pyramids of her sails flash out of the night as the kettles blazed. A clamor of voices, the beating of metal and the incense of their temples, came over the water, and on the fore-peak of the whaler, backed by the fires, lit by lanterns and gyrating brands, they saw the calm figure of a god, not fat, but rather lean and long, with his mustache drooped, his eyes down, his hands folded over his naked stomach.

"Report, Manson, report," gasped Captain Jerry, without disturbing his pose. "They ain't shooting, are they? I can't hear with the crackling of those logs."

For the joss was Captain Jerry. He was not a smooth fat little god; he was a lank, hairy New Englander, but he was stripped to the waist, his bare body gleamed like bronze in the flares, his pose was correct and impressive, his trousers and boots tucked under him were hidden. He had insisted on carrying out his idea himself, since the fore-peak was the point of danger. If he failed to impress the pirates that naked chest in the firelight would be a fine target for their slugs.

But it did not fail. The nearest junk drew away till the *Jennie* passed her. The other one lying straight across the *Jennie's* bows began beating gongs, lighting lanterns, burning propitiatory fire-sticks.

"We've passed one, captain," called the mate, standing by his chief and peering out over the bulwarks. "For God's sake don't move, sir."

"What god, Manson? This yer god's got to sneeze."

Captain Jerry had to move. He had been stifled with the incense burnt in his honor. He had been compelled to keep his eyes down instead of looking at his enemy, and a howl of terror came from the junk when the Chinese saw the joss open his mouth and stretch his strained muscles.

"Lay aboard her, Mr. Manson, I'm not going to let those fellows think I'm a heathen idol. 'Tain't right. Me a church-member back home."

In an instant the *Jennie* crashed into the beam of the junk, and Captain Jerry, pistols in hand, followed by his men, leaped on her deck. He was ashamed of the part he had been playing. It galled him to owe his safety to a superstition. He wanted to redeem himself from this masquerade. But the moment the pirates saw the joss rise and leap at them all they saw in the leaping lights was his naked divinity. Some jumped overboard, preferring to face the gods of the dark waters; others fell to their knees beating their heads on the planks for mercy.

"They won't fight," cried Captain Jerry, "Let up, you pigtail pollywogs; surrender like men to a man. Ain't that a human boot?"

In his disgust at this salaaming he dealt out a few kicks, when Towy, who stood by the captain, and whose absolute nakedness contributed to that officer's impressiveness, took a hand. He slowly walked through the prostrate pirates cracking every bent skull with his waddy. It was sudden, sure. The victims did not stir. They were still worshiping Captain Jerry after they had been executed.

Captain Jerry grew sick at the sight. He could have got away, for the junks were no match for him in speed once he had passed them, but because of his New England pride

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he had stained the clean record of his ship with this unnecessary bloodshed.

"Serves us right, Mr. Manson, serves us right for leaving clean, honest whaling. Let's haul off."

A shot came from inside the matting-hung door of the high cabin, and Towy staggered against the mate.

"Are you hurt?" asked the captain.

Towy pulled himself together, grasped his waddy and spoke.

"Quite recovered captain," he said in slightly foreign, somewhat rusted English as he tore down that matting and entered the cabin.

By a swaying lantern they saw him wrestling with several Chinese. More shots were fired within, but the captain's pistols evened up the fight, though when Towy was carried out and laid on the deck, he was seen to be badly wounded.

"You won't be able to deceive them for long, captain. Make for Hongkong. I'm Captain Ole Jonsen of the *Tekla* of Stockholm. That sandalwood is yours. Thanks for taking me. I'm glad of that bullet, I wanted to die a white man."

His blue eyes wandered round the deck of the junk, littered with dead Chinese, nets, buckets and big stones tied to ropes.

"Open her hold, captain, open her hold."

At what was spoken like an order from a man who knew more than he of the ways of these pirates, Captain Jerry bade his men open the hold of the junk. He feared that many of the Chinese had taken refuge there, and the crew of the *Jennie* stood prepared for a rush of cut-throats.

"Oysters!" cried the captain when he saw that was all the junk contained.

"Pearl oysters," answered the captain of the *Tekla* with his dying breath. "She is a Sulu pearler, and her pearls are yours too."

The *Jennie* was not two years more away from her home port, and though she dropped her anchor in New Bedford with empty barrels, the lowest lay she paid was a record when Captain Jerry divided up the price of the pearls and the sandalwood.

Martha Hackbutt has a string of the pearls to this day, and visitors to the old *Jennie*, now berthed off Fairhaven, often wonder at the strange, rare perfume that exhales from her ancient timbers.

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Author of "Hartley's Luck," "Forty Thousand B. P.," etc.

OUTSIDE the long, two-story brick building, that bore across its front the sign of *William Addison & Company, Bankers*, the afternoon sunlight lay yellow upon the planked pavement of Montgomery Street. Up and down the creaking sidewalks moved, slow or fast, hopeful or despondent, the tides of miners, business men, confessed drifters, of all nations and types, that made San Francisco's colorful population in May of 1855.

Inside the building, within the gloomy private office of William Addison himself, Robert Cary stood before the leathery-faced old Yankee, who stared up at his temporary employee somewhat absently. Addison's mind was still fixed apparently upon the pile of letters brought by yesterday's steamer from the Atlantic.

"I'm finished," Robert Cary repeated patiently. "I've turned over the desk to your nephew, and he is now at work."

Addison nodded briefly. An expression slightly regretful flashed across his long, solemn face.

"I see! I see! Yes!" he assented. "So you want your pay, eh, Cary?"

Robert nodded smilingly. The banker—and for that matter many things in the world—vastly amused the young Tennesseean aristocrat.

"I suppose that's the logical end of our association," he agreed pleasantly. "Your nephew is recovered from his illness, and you have no permanent place for me."

"Yes! Yes! Surely. I'm really sorry, Cary, that I haven't a position for you. Your work has been entirely satisfactory. Quite different from that of most young men in this mad age. Gold! Gold! That's all the rising generation seems to think of here in San Francisco—in all California. But there's no vacancy, so——"

He broke off to open a squat iron safe at his elbow and take from a compartment a handful of the hexagonal gold slugs that served as legal tender.

"A hundred and twenty dollars. Is that satisfactory?"

"Quite. Now, I'll bid you good-by, Mr. Addison."

"Yes! Yes! Of course."

The banker was already intent upon his letters once more.

"Ah—no position in sight, Cary?" he asked.

"Not yet, sir," replied Robert, from the door. "But my friend, Nathaniel Evarts, is trying to find me something permanent. He has applied in my name to Palmer, Cook, to W. T. Coleman, Sam Brannan and others, for the first vacancy."

"Good! Any of them will be excellent employers; Evarts is a good agent. Bright young man; very clever attorney. Congratulate you on having such a friend. Ah—good day!"

"The Fifty-Sixth Immortal," copyright, 1923, by Eugene Cunningham.

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Robert nodded and stepped out upon the sidewalk. Here he halted to look undecidedly up and down, a handsome, athletic figure in brass-buttoned blue frock coat, tight gray pantaloons and varnished boots, his dark hair—worn rather long in the prevailing fashion—covered by a shiny "stovepipe" beaver.

His indecision was more than momentary; it was index to his whole life at that moment. Since his return from the "diggings" of the interior six weeks before, he had been drifting, objectiveless, upon the turbulent sea that was pioneer San Francisco. Occasional odd jobs, such as that he had quitted this afternoon, had kept him from having to borrow of Nat Evarts, but no permanent place had opened to him in the city's life.

As he lounged there in the yellow sunlight, jingling his gold pieces thoughtfully, a lank, somewhat shabby figure, a man three or four years Robert's senior, stepped from the ranks of passers-by. Nat Evarts halted beside his friend, his shrewd, lantern-jawed face softened by a smile.

"Worked yourself out of a job, eh, Bobby?" he remarked, and Robert nodded.

"Just wondering where to go," he confessed. "Lonely town for an idler, Nat."

Two young dandies came toward them at this moment, dressed, like Robert Cary, in the height of the day's fashion. From the opposite direction another beaver-hatted fashionable approached, and the three met abreast of Nat and Robert Cary.

"Well met!" cried a rat-faced little man. "Tompkins, it gives me pleasure to present Mr. Rafferty. Rafferty, my newly arrived friend, Mr. Tompkins, who came on yesterday's steamer from New York to view the Land of the Golden Fleece."

At pronouncement of the names, Nat Evarts turned to stare sharply at the group. To Robert neither name meant anything, but idly he followed Nat's example. He saw a burly man in late twenties—he who had walked alone—shaking hands formally with one of the other pair. Nat jogged Robert's elbow.

"Take a good look at the big man!" he whispered. "That's 'Mex' Rafferty, the bully. Just in from Sacramento. Made a reputation as a killer in the diggings. I hear that he is now working for Judge Spotten. Anyway, Rafferty was made a deputy sheriff yesterday."

Robert studied the broad-shouldered Rafferty carelessly, noting the heavy-chinned, pugnacious face, the hard, bold black eyes and florid skin. Then he shrugged indifferently. In a town so well supplied with fire-eaters as San Francisco, addition of another seemed anything but remarkable.

"Doesn't mean anything to you, eh?" grinned Nat. "Well, Bobby," he added sententiously, "since we've decided that you're going to live here, you'll find that nothing is too small to deserve notice. As for me, being already known as a political enemy of Judge Alger Spotten, any addition to his faithful following interests me. Who can say when I shall openly offend 'is 'onor and—come to meet Mex Rafferty over a Colt?"

"Spotten," said Robert Cary deliberately, yet with an observable edge to his tone, "to my mind is a vastly overrated figure. To me he looks very much the blowhard; only dangerous if he's at one's back."

"Oh, *ho!*"

Nat was staring curiously at his friend.

"I somehow deduce a personal animus in that outburst," he commented. "Just when did Alger Spotten tread upon *your* shiny boots?"

Robert smiled, watching the three young elegants move down-street together.

"You're right," he confessed. "I do bear Spotten a grudge. Happened last year. Remember little Sam Hardee, who came with us on the steamer from New Orleans? Well, Sam and I met again in I-Bet Diggings, on Deer Creek in Nevada County. We went partners. Spotten was up there at the time, with claims for sale. We bought a promising-looking stretch of creek-bed and it panned—exactly nothing. I'm morally certain that Spotten salted it—every claim in the string he sold was the same—but I can't prove it. However—I haven't forgotten! One of these days, if opportunity offers, I'll square that score!"

Nat grinned at the account, but suddenly his face went very sober.

"Don't blame you, Bobby. But—be careful! Don't underestimate our fat friend. He is bashaw of San Francisco today. Boss of the ring. Men of my position are fairly safe; we hang together, and Spotten doesn't care to force an issue with us yet. But a lone man is in entirely different case. Spotten's crooked finger can

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account for most men, through his organization. And if the man hits back, then Spotten gets him, legally or otherwise. You be careful! Don't shout your dislike for him from the housetops."

"Why, all right, old Solon!" laughed Robert, slipping an arm through Nat's. "But let's walk a bit. Should be some new scandal under discussion in the Golden Horn."

ROBERT CARY and Nat Evarts occupied joint lodgings on Clay Street, getting their meals at restaurants. But they saw little of each other except of evenings, for the Maine man was already making his mark as an unusually capable attorney. His practise was growing by leaps and bounds, keeping him hurrying about the city during most of the day; often of nights as well.

They had supper together and Robert left the restaurant with his friend, but at the door they parted. Nat hurried back to his office for a conference with clients, while Robert sauntered aimlessly up Clay toward Portsmouth Square—the Plaza. Save only Nat Evarts, he had no acquaintance in all the city; the only places open to him were the saloons and gambling-hells which, though beginning to be frowned upon by the conservative citizens, still ringed the Plaza with brilliant lights.

He had nearly reached Kearny Street when he met a hurrying, stooped figure. William Addison halted to stare absently for a moment. Then his long face split in a smile, rather to Robert's surprize.

"Good evening, Cary!" cried Addison. "Well met! Would you—ah—do me a slight favor? No one else I can ask at the instant. Just a little errand. Oblige me tremendously——"

"What is it?" inquired Robert, amused as always by the banker's oddities of speech and manner. "If it isn't actually criminal perhaps I can execute it."

"Criminal!" gasped the banker owlishly. "Oh, no! No! Nothing like that, I assure you! Not at all! It's just the delivery of an important packet. Was going myself, but—have a call to a conference of bank-directors. Have to go immediately. Overdue now. Packet for Judge Spotten. Would you mind taking it to his house on Stockton Street? Great favor to me. Put me under obligations and—and—all that!"

"For Spotten!" frowned Robert. "Well, that's a bit different, Mr. Addison. If it were for any one else, why, I'd do it gladly. But Spotten——"

"Why, it's just an important memorandum. Nothing to affect the carrier. Wish you would, Cary. Great favor to me."

Robert hesitated still, but old Addison had been kindly in his absent fashion, and Robert was by nature an obliging soul. So somewhat ruefully he held out his hand for the packet.

"All right, I'll take it for you. I know Spotten's house."

"Thanks! Great favor. Won't forget it, Cary. If the judge gives you an answer, you can give it to me tomorrow. I—I suppose I can't—recompense you for the trouble?"

"Certainly not!" retorted the young man stiffly. "I'm not a messenger-boy, Mr. Addison. I'll do this errand for you because of friendship, not for money."

"No offense! None meant! None at all! Thanks, greatly, Cary. Ah—good night."

Robert continued up Clay, passing the iron-fenced Plaza, and so came into Stockton Street, then beginning to fill with the mansions of the wealthy. Spotten's big brick house, one of the town's show-places, loomed vaguely in the darkness. From a lower window came a gleam of light.

Robert entered the ornamental iron gate and passed up a brick walk. Before he had touched the knocker a white-jacketed Chinaman swung the door open.

"Hullo!" he said, giving the orthodox greeting of his kind. "What you want, huh?"

"Is Judge Spotten at home?"

"Judge in libaly. You go there."

Robert crossed the wide hallway and opened the door indicated. There was a cheerful fire on the hearth in the room he entered; near it, behind a broad mahogany table, lounged a massive man in plum-colored frock coat and brocaded satin waistcoat.

Robert's eyes went curiously to the broad, florid face, the twinkling little black eyes almost hidden in rolls of fat, the big, predacious nose overhanging wide, gash-thin mouth. He had never before seen Spotten, for Sam Hardee had arranged the details of the claim's purchase at I-Bet.

"Evenin', suh," Spotten greeted him

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formally in a husky voice that hinted of too rich living.

"I have some memoranda for you from Mr. William Addison," explained Robert.

He laid the packet on the table, and Spotten drew it toward him without removing his twinkling, inquisitive eyes from the young man's face.

"I see. Won't you be seated while I glance at them? I may wish to answeh the note."

Robert took the indicated chair and began studying the portly political ruler of the city. The more he saw of Spotten, the stronger waxed his dislike. There was not a sincere, honest line in the face. Treachery, cruelty, selfishness; a combination of hog and wolf, with no little of the fox, he read in the judge's features.

Robert recalled all that he had heard of Spotten: A Virginian lawyer, it was rumored that his departure from his native State had been both hurried and from cause. After an unenviable career at the diggings as dealer in doubtful claims, gambler, saloonkeeper and in other, even shadier, occupations, he had come down to San Francisco and somehow got himself made a judge. Now there were few controlling wires in the city that did not eventually trace back to his fat, pink hands.

The hall-door opened and the Chinaman padded over to his master. He bent and whispered in Spotten's ear. The judge shot a keen glance at Robert, then hesitated momentarily.

"Tell him I'm engaged just now!" he snapped. "He'll have to wait."

The Chinaman padded noiselessly out again, closing the door behind him. Spotten finished Addison's note and laid the papers down.

"There's no answer?" Robert inquired politely.

Spotten made no reply for a moment, but stared thoughtfully at his visitor, seeming to analyze him feature by feature.

"I'm not certain," he evaded. "Ah—pardon my curiosity, but—I don't recall your face, young suh. Are you in the employ of Mr. Addison?"

"Not now," said Robert coldly. "I brought this message as a favor to him. As for my face—you've never seen it before, though you *did* have dealings with me once. Perhaps you recall that early last year you were selling claims on Deer Creek? I see that you do! It maybe that you remember unloading one—cleverly-salted—upon two greenhorn miners; Robert Cary and—Samuel Hardee?"

"I think I do recall the names," Spotten admitted smilingly. "But, suh! You are grievously in erroh if you believe that the ground was salted. No, indeed! I *hope* I am above such petty tricks, suh!"

He looked so grandly virtuous that it seemed absurd to accuse him of such traffic, but Robert Cary only regarded him with a wearily contemptuous smile.

"The claim was salted," he asserted flatly. "Of course, I don't insinuate that *you* salted it. That would be ridiculous—when you could hire some one to do it so cheaply."

"Suh!" cried Spotten indignantly.

Then he shrugged with a tolerant smile.

"It is natural, I suppose, that the buyeh of a barren claim should be disappointed; should feel inclined to make charges which have no foundation in fact. I am truly grieved, suh, that you were unfortunate.

"But you said you were not in Mr. Addison's employ *now?* Then may I inquire if you are in any one's employ?"

Robert shook his head, regarding the judge through lazily narrowed eyes.

"Suppose," said Spotten very slowly, "*suppose* that I should remark that young men in my employ rise—rapidly? Meteorically, I might even maintain?"

Robert stared hard at the heavy face, wondering just what crooked thoughts moved behind the gross mask. At last he shook his head, his pleasant, if somewhat haughty, face mirroring contempt. He had no desire to become one of the wily judge's tools.

"If it's a position you're hinting at so cautiously," he drawled, "then I decline beforehand. You see—" his lazy voice held an open sneer—"I'm *very* particular in selecting an employer. I don't mind saying that I distrust you utterly; that I am suspicious of the honesty of any enterprise in which you may be interested."

"Suh!" blazed Spotten, his face reddening furiously.

Then apparently he recovered his self-control; the smiling mask slipped into place again. He shook his head sadly at Robert.

"I feah, young suh, that you are allowin' your misfortune of last yeah to coloh your thoughts of me. But I pass oveh that.

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I am tryin' to do you a favoh. There is a—certain position in which I believe you would fit admirably. May I ask if you are—handy with weapons?"

Robert hesitated for an instant. So far the interview had mildly amused him. A certain youthful independence prompted him to bait the judge; he yielded to the impulse.

Turning carelessly in his chair, he looked about him. The room was lighted by tall, scented candles in silver sconces. From the side pockets of his coat Robert jerked a pair of heavy-bored, silver-mounted derringers with almost prestidigital speed. He flipped them up and pressed the triggers simultaneously. Two candles, in sconces ten feet apart, went out with nipped wicks; then Robert replaced the little pistols.

"Oh, I do fairly well, sir," he yawned.

At the pistol-shots a silken curtain that masked a rear door moved slightly. Robert noted the curtain's swaying; also he saw that the hall-door had opened soundlessly for two inches and remained so. Spotten, moveless in his chair, had seen the curtain only. Very slightly he shook his big head, and the curtain was still again.

Undoubtedly, reflected Robert, some of the notoriously efficient serving-men of Spotten, reported ever to hover near him, watched from behind that curtain. Spotten's nod had been a restraining signal. Carelessly Robert moved, pushing back the skirts of his coat so that the black butt of a heavy Navy revolver showed. Spotten smiled again.

"Mr.—ah—Hardee, I think you said?" he began, and Robert did not correct him. "I am more than eveh convinced that we should talk business. I may say that in all of San Francisco you could find no more profitable employment than I offeh you. How would—five hundred dollahs a month suit you? With the—ah—opportunity of materially increasin' that sum? Very materially increasin' it, I may say."

"No answer to Mr. Addison's note, you said?" drawled Robert, rising. "Then I'll be leaving, judge, since you have nothing of interest to say to me."

As their eyes met like unsheathed blades the hall-door swung wide and both turned toward it. They faced a queer little man, slight of build, barely five feet tall, in rusty brown frock coat, who limped up to the table and stared calmly down at Spotten. The judge's heavy features were set in new, grim lines. Pseudo-geniality had faded quite; the gross countenance was menacing as a snake's raised head.

Robert Cary studied the little man curiously, noting the high thinker's forehead, the towy hair, the colorless brows, the angular outline of the pallid face. He was fascinated by the man's eyes, of an odd, light-gray shade, very wide open, steady as a hawk's; by the firm, grim cast of the coarse-lipped mouth.

"Well!" snarled Spotten. "What d' *you* want, *Colonel* William Walker?"

WILLIAM WALKER! Robert's eyes widened. *This* Walker? This insignificant little figure the famous doctor-lawyer-editor who had set all California agog the year before with his daredevil expedition to Lower California? This the intrepid captain who had led a handful of red-shirted adventurers the length of the peninsula, fighting step by step like wild men against overwhelming odds? The leader who dispassionately shot down his own fierce expeditionaires for any breach of discipline? It seemed incredible. In fancy Robert Cary had always pictured Walker as a huge, bull-voiced man, belt a-bristle with revolvers, every other word a lurid oath.

"I am here tonight to give you warning, Spotten," came the little man's dry, precise voice. "Ever since I commenced preparation for my colonization expedition to Nicaragua, you have annoyed me in every way possible. I am well aware of the real reason for the libels posted against my brig, the *Vesta*. I have never doubted whose hand moved behind the thousand petty obstacles thrown in my way by city officials. Now I am tired of these annoyances.

"Stripping the brig's sails from the masts and locking them in sheriff's store was the last straw. If those sails are not returned by ten tomorrow morning—I shall hold you personally responsible."

Not one word inflected above another; not the slightest gesture; only the unwavering regard of those luminous, round gray eyes. Yet Spotten moved uneasily in his chair. For an instant Robert thought that the judge's will would yield before the will of Walker. But in that instant came interruption.

Feet scuffled outside the curtained rear

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door. Muffled, angry voices; then a man hurtled through the doorway, almost snatching down the curtain as he came. A bloody, disheveled figure, with boots caked with fresh mud; with face sweat-streaked and pallid; with bloodshot eyes glaring all ways at once; that rushed across the library to lean upon the table and gasp chokingly. Robert recognized the intruder as one Sullivan, a shoulder-striker of unusually unsavory record.

"I downed him!" gasped Sullivan with eyes only for Spotten. "I shot Kenton! But three of his reporters—were near. They—chased me! Shot at me! Got me in the shoulder. They're still after me! Chased me here!

"Ye *got* to stand by me, judge. Ye *told* me to kill Kenton! I hadn't nothin' against him. 'T was your doin'! Now, ye got to save me! —— it! I tell ye they're outside now!"

Spotten leaped to his feet, his face putty-hued for an instant. Then the blood surged back into it. He pounded the table with a fist that shook it, raising his voice in a bull-bellow.

"Rafferty! Soulis! In here!"

But Robert Cary was as quick. Very well he knew what Sullivan's account meant. Kenton, the fiery little editor of the *Union*, was Spotten's enemy. Spotten had ordered Sullivan to murder the editor, and now proof of that had been given to outsiders. It would not be like Spotten to permit news of this assassination to get abroad. So Robert Cary whipped out his heavy Colt, menacing Spotten, but with an eye also upon that curtained rear door.

"Tell 'em to stay back!" he commanded. "First man through that door dies—with you, Spotten! Tell 'em—*quick!*"

With voice that shook and cracked from barely restrained fury Spotten countermanded his order. Robert Cary had stepped swiftly behind the judge, so that the portly body shielded him from the door. While Walker watched expressionlessly, Robert's hand went beneath Spotten's coat tails and brought out a Navy revolver. Then he removed from the coat pockets a brace of derringers; took another pair from pockets of the waistcoat.

"—— you!" mouthed Spotten thickly. "You can't get away with this! Nor you, Walker! As for you, Sullivan——"

The glare he sent at the trembling ruffian was more deadly threat than any words.

"I'll settle with you all! I'll pay you——"

"Shut up!"

A pistol-muzzle prodded Spotten's fat back.

"I'd as soon drill you here and now as not. Put your hands up! *Keep* 'em up! We're going out of here, Walker and I. If you drop your hands an inch, if any one moves at that door, or elsewhere—you're out!"

"Remember, Spotten," drawled Walker, turning toward the hall-door, "ten o'clock tomorrow is your limit."

He opened the door, with a hand hidden in his coat pocket while he scanned the hallway. Robert backed toward him, slipped through the door and slammed it shut. Walker was holding open the front door. They leaped down the steps and gained the front gate.

Here a huge figure rose with the suddenness of a jack-in-the-box from the grass beside the fence. Robert flipped up his Colt with a stifled exclamation, but steely fingers closed about his wrist.

"It's Lieutenant Bryant of my force," Walker reassured him. "Well, Bryant?"

"Three *hombres* just sneaked through the side gate, colonel. They're a-crawlin' up the fence now. Best scoot across the street!"

They sprinted across, coming to the shelter of a black alley-mouth. The night was cloudy, and a high fog hid the moon. In the alley they paused. Bryant, gripping a long rifle, craned his neck to listen.

"You an' this younker better skip the town!" he whispered. "I'll stay behind an' bushwhack 'em."

Again Robert felt those amazingly strong fingers upon his arm, this time pushing him forward. They went gingerly down the muddy alley for perhaps fifty feet. Then the snapping report of a rifle sounded behind them, followed by a volley of pistol-shots. Robert jerked free.

"I won't skulk here while some one else fights my battles!" he cried.

"Don't play the boy daredevil!" advised Walker caustically. "Bryant can handle a dozen of Spotten's shoulder-strikers. He's an old Texan plainsman, cunning as a Comanche at this sort of fighting."

"Nevertheless I'm going back to help him."

Robert dashed back toward the alley-mouth; but before he had covered a half-dozen yards a single pistol-shot sounded

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close ahead; then Bryant's gaunt figure appeared suddenly before him, his moccasined feet falling like shadows. Robert had heard no footfall behind him, yet there was Walker also at his elbow.

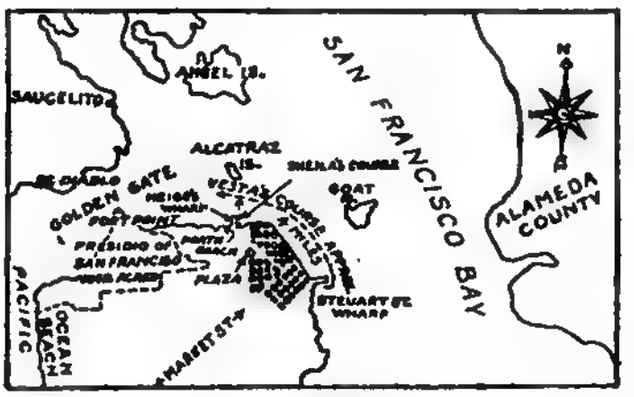
"Thet you, colonel?" grunted Bryant. "I winged two. T' other one's got no belly for my game. Gone back a-tootlin'. Why'n't you skip fer town?"

"Our young friend insisted on coming to help you," explained Walker dryly.

"Sho!"

Tex Bryant chuckled amusedly.

"Why, sonny, any time ol' Tex needs help to handle *thet* sort o' trash he'll be a mighty puny ol' man. Not thet I blame you a bit! I like a man thet sticks to his side."



SAN FRANCISCO AND ENVIRONS AS THEY WERE IN 1855

They turned back. Robert felt himself flushing. His exhibition in the judge's library even was beginning to appear a bit of youthful bravado, and Walker's tone had cut. They came out upon Dupont Street, a fairly well-lit thoroughfare. Robert and his little ally faced toward the town's center, with Bryant, a gaunt figure in fringed buckskin coat and slouch hat, sauntering some twenty yards behind. Presently the big Texan began to sing, in a clear, sweet tenor, to the tune of "Golden Slippers:"

"Oh, thet brig, the *Vesta*.
Oh, thet brig, the *Vesta*.
The boat thet's goin' to carry us all away,
Ca'y us *'way!*
Give three cheers fer Walker!
Give three cheers fer Walker!
We're goin' south to Nicaragu-*a-a-a!*"

Before the lighted windows of a dingy little eating-house Walker halted and studied his companion keenly for a moment.

"From your accent you're a Southerner," he said thoughtfully. "Would you mind telling me whether you're Robert Cary or Samuel Hardee? I noted—you see, I eavesdropped on your entire conversation with the judge—that you didn't tell Spotten *which* of the partners you were, and that he jumped to the conclusion that you were Hardee."

"I am Robert Cary. Since you heard our conversation, you perhaps understand why I thought it made no difference what name Spotten knew me by."

"I see. It seems that the judge's enmity toward us both creates a sort of bond. Will you come in and have something to eat? That is, if you don't mind conversing with a comparative stranger."

"You're not exactly a stranger," retorted Robert, his resentment at Walker's cavalier tone fading. "In fact we're schoolmates in a way. Like you, I graduated from the University of Nashville, though five years after your time. My people are the Bellemead Carys."

Walker's rare smile softened his harsh features wonderfully. Even the cold gray eyes seemed to lose their icy glint.

"A Nashville man! Then indeed we're not strangers. If I can do anything for you you may count on me. Seriously, since we chanced upon that revelation of Spotten's activities, we're both marked men. Either of us may soon need all the allies we can muster. Spotten was my bitter enemy long before tonight. I came near having him unseated while I was editor of the *Herald* here. He has never forgiven me. But come inside!"

THEY found a table, oilcloth-covered and greasy, in a quiet corner. When a slouching Mexican had put food before them Tex Bryant fell to silently, while Walker and Robert Cary discussed persons and events in Tennessee, a pleasant, peaceful land that seemed almost as far distant from turbulent California as Timbuktu.

Then Robert without considering his strange loquacity spoke of his ill fortune at the mines and so far in San Francisco. Walker listened intently, stirring the muddy liquid in his coffee-cup. Suddenly he raised his wide gray eyes to meet Robert's.

"They have better coffee in Nicaragua," he remarked with seeming irrelevance.

Robert nodded, his black brows creasing in a slight, puzzled frown.

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"Indeed they have," he agreed. "I crossed Nicaragua on my way here from New Orleans, and it seemed a fertile land. But——"

"This time next month," Walker went on slowly, still absently plying his spoon, "I shall be drinking my coffee in Realejo."

His gaze seemed to take on intensity. Robert Cary, staring at the widened eyes, felt suddenly the immense magnetism of the man, which he could exercise when he chose.

"Won't you come to Nicaragua with me, Cary, and have some of that coffee?"

There was silence for a space. Robert's steel-blue eyes were held by the little man's luminous gaze. Then slowly with a sigh the younger man shook his head, surprized to feel so much actual regret that his fortunes were not entwined with those of this odd, heroic little figure.

"I think not, colonel. I'm nearly twenty-four; in the two years since leaving Bellemead I've done nothing but drift. It has been proved to me—" he smiled wryly at memory of Nat's many lectures "—that unless I settle down now I'm apt to end life a drifter. I've given my word to be conservative hereafter—not to go chasing brilliant will-o'-the-wisps, but to stay here and become a staid, respectable man of affairs. A friend is trying to find me a situation now."

"Remember Spotten!" warned Walker. "From this minute on, unless you leave the city, your life will be the price of unsleeping vigilance. Spotten is the strongest force for evil in all this strange conglomeration of good and bad called San Francisco. He and his satellites practically rule the city. The honest men are too engrossed in wealth-gathering to interfere. Besides, it requires some specific, unbearable deed to rouse your honest men, to fuse them into a corrective body—such as the Vigilantes of '51—strong enough to overturn such an organization as Spotten has built. In the mean while things are as they are today.

"Remember! Tonight you and I overheard some damning evidence against Spotten. Do you think for a moment that he intends us to go freely about, telling that he ordered Kenton's death?

"Do you want my advice? A lawyer's counsel and a well-wisher's? Swallow your pride; admit that you aren't strong enough to oppose Spotten! Leave San Francisco either with me or alone. I tell you, Cary, seriously and with no exaggeration, this is not Tennessee; this is not even the United States! This is San Francisco, in the year 1855! Either you will join hands with Spotten and do his dirty work, or your life is worth no more than—that fly's!"

The stubborn Cary chin lifted slightly. Robert's face hardened. They were stiff steel, those Tennessee Carys—as perhaps Walker knew—an old family with many brave traditions and vast pride of ancestry. This handsome, hot-headed sprig was a typical son of the house.

"Colonel," said Robert haughtily, "*Carys* aren't used to being driven! Spotten may be all that you say, but he can't kick me out of the path like a yellow dog."

Walker shook his head disapprovingly. He fumbled with his cup for a moment, then fell to talking. Presently Robert Cary forgot the dingy restaurant; his blue eyes glowed as he listened breathlessly. The flat, dry voice changed, became flexible, even musical. Tex Bryant shoved aside his empty plate and leaned rigidly forward, his swarthy face lit up, his Indian-like black eyes glinting metallically.

"Down at Steuart Street wharf lies the *Vesta*, the old brig I've chartered. Already aboard are fifty-six men ready to sail for Nicaragua. To avoid violation of neutrality laws we go ostensibly as colonists. But each man is well armed—an embryo soldier. Some of them are veterans of the Texas Revolution and the Mexican War, like Bryant here. A number were with me in Lower California. Fighters all!

"The *Vesta* is heavily libeled for debts contracted by Lamson, her owner, but eventually I'll settle these libels and we'll sail. Then—*Realejo!*"

The word was like a bugle-blast.

"To join Castellon in his war upon Fruto Chamorro and the Legitimists. Castellon is rightful ruler of Nicaragua; the only man able to bring peace to that revolution-torn country. He is a man of liberal views; such a democrat as was our own Jefferson. Chamorro seized the presidency illegally; banished Castellon and other Democrats. Castellon returned at risk of his life and the whole country—except the Legitimists, who opposed him for selfish, private reasons—acclaimed him the Liberator.

"But the Legitimists are strong. They

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hold three-fourths of the country by force of arms. That is why Castellon has asked me to join him with such fighting-men as I can enlist. The Democrats are anxiously awaiting us; they will receive us as fellow-crusaders. No matter what sneering enemies here may say, we fight on the side of right in Nicaragua!

"I wish you'd come with us, Cary. I'd like to have near me a fellow Tennesseean, a man of my own caste and kind; one in whom I might place implicit trust.

"I can promise you sight of a fertile country, fairer than the Mohammedan's dream of Paradise; a green, sweet, smiling land with riches untouched, waiting energetic hands—American hands. If you want adventure such as you've thrilled to read in old romances—come with me to Nicaragua! I promise you we'll all carve our names in history. If you want riches and power—again, come to Nicaragua! For the lieutenants who stand beside me now, I will open doors to posts higher than they dream of!

"Nicaragua may well be only our beginning! Costa Rica, Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala—even Mexico! What do you say to a single great State, extending from Texas south to Panama; a State of brown people with white rulers? A strong State, such as Napoleon might have carved and governed; treating as an equal with the great empires of Europe? What would you say to a very high post in such a State?

"There is something here, Robert Cary—" he tapped the threadbare brown coat above his heart with a simple earnestness that robbed the gesture of theatricalness "—that tells me I am fated to make my name ring round the world. It may be that I shall fail, but I promise you it will be failure without shame! Will you come with me, Robert Cary? Not in years have I said the half of this to any man. I offer you no more than a lieutenancy, but that holds opportunity such as might have been given to a lieutenant of Cæsar or Napoleon. Will you come with me, Robert Cary?"

Slowly Robert came back to earth; back to the dingy eating-house on a back street in workaday San Francisco, from the far fields of the fancy in which he had wandered. His imagination had leaped with the pictures, gilding them, making of them real things already come to pass. He sighed, and the sound was echoed cavernously by the gaunt frontiersman opposite.

But with return to prosaic surroundings he was once again enmeshed by their cogs; he remembered his promise to Nat Evarts to go no more a-wild-goose-chasing. There was in him, with his faults of recklessness and overtouchy pride, the virtue of a bulldog determination that made him cling to whatever road he had planned to walk. Slowly but with resolution he shook his head.

"The offer is well-nigh irresistible," he sighed. "But—I've made my promise. I thank you for your confidence, colonel, but I guess I'll stay here."

Walker nodded imperturbably.

"I think you make a mistake," he said quietly. "But—every man must be master of his own destiny."

They left the place, and outside Walker held out his hand with a grave smile.

"It may well be that we part here for all time. So, good-by and good luck."

"Good-by," Robert responded half-wistfully. "I hope your plans will materialize as you hope. Then some day I may address you as the Emperor of Central America!"

Walker's angular face mirrored no answering smile. He stood rigid, staring into the darkness, his gray eyes widened like a crystal-gazer's, seeming lighted from within by some mystic fire. If he saw into the future—envisioned those heroic thousands he was to command, two-thirds of whom would return to the States to demonstrate upon Civil War battle-fields, in the paths of peace, their grim training under this little empire-snatcher—he made no sign.

"You speak no more than simple truth," he assented. "Good-by, Robert Cary."

NAT listened frowningly as Robert described—with no glossing of his own demerits—the night's events, at breakfast next morning. He nodded gloomily at the end.

"Walker was entirely right, young hothead! Lucky for you that he and Tex Bryant were with you. Otherwise you'd have been our 'man for breakfast' this morning. Well?"

"'Well,' yourself!" countered Robert, smiling tight-lipped. "Have *you* safe-and-sane counsel up your sleeve? Do you share Walker's view that because Spotten is

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not my dear friend I'd best tuck my tail between my legs and fly for my life?"

"I *do* believe that you could find more healthful climates than that of San Francisco," Nat assured him thoughtfully.

At sight of his friend's wobegone expression Robert laughed outright. There was something winning about the young Tennesseean; most men liked him well; he made good friends without apparent effort. Nat Evarts realized this suddenly as he studied the handsome, tanned face of his *vis-à-vis*. But the Cary recklessness must be curbed.

"Bobby," he drawled, his rugged face still rueful, but with a faint smile lurking in the depths of shrewd, green eyes, "I like you heaps and heaps. You know that. Don't know any one in the world I like as much. That was deep water and a big shark you saved me from, that day I tumbled into Lake Nicaragua off the transport steamer. That's why I'm telling you what I really think instead of what you'd prefer to hear.

"You haughty young Southerners aren't easy to advise; you all want to hoe your own row in your own way. You sort of fancy yourselves.

"Now, you're chain-lightning with handguns and all that. Which is good. *But* you're too blame' reckless; because you always have somehow pulled out of tight places, you think you always will. In war you're knight errant, not general. You don't give your opponent credit enough. Here you are, open enemy of the shrewdest, most unscrupulous man in California, and your sole plan of action is summed up in the words—

"'I'll lick him—*somehow!*'

"Bobby, Spotten is a dangerous man! One of these days we of the opposition will smash him, but we aren't ready yet. Now if all the decent element—such influential, prominent, brainy men as Coleman, Brannan, King of William and your humble servant—hesitate, isn't it a *mite* uppish of a young fellow your size to think he can down Spotten all alone?

"What I'm driving at is the urgent need for cautious walking on your part. Spotten's not a bit worried about you—except temporarily perhaps. He has too many efficient tools for just such occasions.

"Take Walker's case. Of all the men in town, not even excepting Coleman and other old 'stranglers,' I don't know of any one I'd rather have as ally. It's considered most unhealthful to annoy Walker past a certain point.

"But such considerations worry Spotten not at all. He has sicked the authorities on to Walker; hunted up creditors of the *Vesta's* owner and induced 'em to libel the brig for debt. He had the sheriff grab the brig's sails yesterday and lock 'em up. He talked the U. S. marshal into running the revenue cutter *Marcy* alongside the *Vesta* to see that she didn't sneak out unawares."

"Why doesn't Walker charter another vessel then?" Robert inquired idly.

"No money! He'd pawn his immortal soul today for a thousand dollars. He's operating on a flat poke. Palmer, the banker, loaned him a thousand. That, with the few dollars Walker had, went for the *Vesta's* charter-party. He can't beg or borrow another penny. My personal conviction is that he'll never get out."

"I doubt that!"

Robert was remembering the "Little Colonel's" harsh-lined face.

"But about my recklessness, Old Faithful: You must admit that I've sobered a lot. There was Walker offering me all sorts of adventures so fascinatingly that I would have jumped at the chance but for the promise I made you to settle down here. And I refused!

"Well, I suppose you're going to be busy today—as usual?"

"Indeed yes! I've got a full forenoon's work on a land-title case; one of those —— Peter Smith tangles. But I'll see you at noon."

AT NOON Nat snatched a hasty lunch and returned to the office immediately with a rueful comment on the vast labor and small fame attaching to land-title cases in general. Left to his own devices, Robert wandered aimlessly about the streets, mingling with the throngs that seemed always to people the sand—or plank-paved thoroughfares. About him were miners in exaggeratedly uncouth garb—jeans trousers thrust into high, mud-caked boots; red or blue flannel shirts; flopping slouch hats; belts abristle with Colts and bowie-knives. There were grinning brown Kanakas and Chilenos; bland Chinese in colorful silks; swarthy Californians of Mexican blood, picturesque in short

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green or red jackets, silver-decorated sombreros and loose, slashed trousers. Sober-faced merchants, doctors and lawyers rubbed shoulders democratically with all these, and with elegant youngsters like Robert Cary. An optimistic, adventurous horde, very young in the average, living ten years in one in mining-camp or metropolis alike.

For any young man without friends the busy city was a lonely place. Toward three o'clock, wearied of sauntering and more than a trifle tired of his own thoughts, Robert turned toward the Golden Horn Saloon on Kearny Street, more in search of companionship—vicarious as it would be—than a drink. Inside the long, crowded room he threaded his way to the bar and ordered, then fingered his glass idly, watching and listening.

This was a favorite resort of prominent men of all occupations. All about Robert were groups of acquaintances, discussing this or that bit of local news, or talking excitedly, with true San Franciscan grandiloquence, of huge enterprises.

Robert found no familiar face anywhere. Then a hand touched his arm, and he turned to face Alger Spotten.

Robert's face hardened instantly. He met the judge's little eyes coldly. But Spotten's broad, pink countenance was twisted into a genial semblance; one might have believed him Robert's most intimate friend.

"Afternoon!" boomed the judge heartily. "Wooin' Bacchus, eh?"

Robert nodded stiffly and picked up his glass. Spotten ordered and stood with brandy in hand, his lips still curved, but with eyes roving keenly over Robert's face. He drained the glass and set it down, then moved closer to Robert.

"I am wonderin'," he said in a low tone, "if a night of reflection has not induced you to alteh your decision—about the employment I offehed you last night."

"Not at all!" Robert assured him emphatically. "It has only hardened my determination to have nothing whatever to do with you or with anything you're connected with."

Spotten regarded him steadily. At last he seemed to understand that the young man meant just what he had said. He bent a trifle forward, the smile vanished. His little eyes were half-hidden beneath lowered lids; subtly he was become a menacing figure.

"I've given you a final chance," he said, so low that none around them could overhear. "I shall make no more offehs. I shall warn you instead. I am not a man to be trifled with! Eitheh you join my—forces, or——"

"Or?" repeated Robert Cary, staring at the heavy face with narrowed eyes.

"*Or* you leave the city immediately—*at once!*"

Suddenly Robert Cary lifted his chin and laughed full in Spotten's face. At the strained, mirthless sound men about them wheeled to stare. They were in a zone of silence instantly. But Robert Cary was heedless of all save Spotten. He thrust his face within a foot of Spotten's, his blue eyes frosty.

"So *you* order me to leave town!" he said deliberately, so distinctly that all might hear. "Why, you fat, yellow-livered claim-salter, do you think I'm worried by your threats? I'll stay here; I'll do and say just what I like. If you're hunting trouble, it's yours for the asking any time you please. Any way, too! Send your hired gunmen to assassinate me—as Sullivan tried to assassinate Kenton last night. Try meeting me personally.

"Spotten, it pleases me to tell you publicly that you're a cheap thief! You've ruled the roost here until you think the town belongs to you. Well, I'm one man you can't bully!"

"—— you!" bellowed Spotten. "I'll show you!"

His hand dropped flashingly. But before he had gripped the revolver beneath his coat; before Robert Cary had more than touched hand to pistol-butt; before the breathless spectators had surged back a foot; a big, bareheaded man, with something about him that breathed "killer," leaped between them. He clapped a pistol-muzzle against each.

"None o' that, gents!" commanded the bouncer determinedly if monotonously. "No shootin' in here. House orders. Take your fight outside!"

"Am I to receive an insult," roared Spotten, "without being permitted to resent it? Remove your gun, suh, or it'll be the worse for you!"

"House orders," repeated the bouncer in singsong tone. "Streets are open to you, gents, if you want to shoot it out."

"Quite so," drawled Robert Cary, "and

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you're entitled to the usual method of satisfaction, Spotten. Although," he added maliciously, "it *is* customary for both parties to an affair of honor to be *gentlemen*. However, I'll waive that."

There was a sudden agitation in the packed mass surrounding the trio. Nat Evarts, grim of face, elbowed his way to the bar and stood beside Robert. He had entered just in time to overhear the challenge.

"That's right, Spotten!" he snapped. "Since you're hunting trouble, my friend and I will gladly arrange to give you a bellyful. Name a friend and let him confer with me."

Spotten's little eyes were shifting to and fro. For the victor in a dozen-odd "affairs" he seemed strangely hesitant to enter another. But there was no backing down now without public loss of caste. He searched the crowd until he found a familiar face.

"Very well, suh!" he agreed with what dignity he could muster. "I name Mr. Conway yondeh, if he will consent to act for me."

Conway came forward, a burly man with the look of a professional politician of the lower type. Nat touched Robert's arm.

"You go to the room," he whispered. "I'll arrange the details."

Robert made his way through the gaping men, who turned to eye him wonderingly as he passed. In the room he waited for a half-hour, then Nat came in and tossed his hat to the bed, sat down and looked whimsically at his friend.

"Well," he grunted, "it's all settled. Ten o'clock, day after tomorrow morning, at Laguna Merced. Navy sixes; ten yards. As challenged party, Spotten had the right to settle details, so I said to Conway—thought we might as well keep our crest up—

" 'Well, Conway, when, where and with what shall my man kill yours?'

"And we settled as I've said. You've gone and done it, young gamecock! Still—don't know but it's best this way. If he drills you, you won't worry, while if you get him, you'll do it in regular fashion; none of this street-brawling. That's what I was afraid of.

"You see, the conservative element of town is mighty fed up with that sort of lawlessness. There's talk of organizing a committee to force the courts to prosecute—and *hang*, if justified—street killers. Now if Spotten should drop you in a street row his political influence would save him. If on the other hand you should kill him, no matter how just your cause might be, you'd be in mighty real danger.

"His side might string you up offhand; or if you should get to trial you'd have all the better element against you, also, willy-nilly. They'd have to help hang you for the sake of consistency. See? Now though duels aren't so popular with us as they used to be, at least they're recognized. But—there's more need than ever for walking carefully, Bobby! Spotten has seen you shoot, and I misjudge him much if he's willing to face you at Laguna Merced—*if there's a safer way out!*"

Robert nodded carelessly. Only one thing worried him; that the affair was thirty-odd hours distant. Waiting was the hardest thing his impetuous nature ever found to do.

"I'll walk softly," he promised. "But wouldn't it look strange if I should be killed by an assassin, immediately after a duel had been arranged between Spotten and me?"

"Bobby," said Nat wearily, "Spotten could lie himself out of *anything*. Can't I get that into your young skull? You go carefully until we actually face him. Now I'm gone again. I've got to get a rig and drive to the Mission. Client of mine is bedridden there, and I must see him. You'll be careful?"

Robert nodded, and Nat seized his hat. At the door he hesitated as if to emphasize his warning, but changed his mind and went out without further words.

ROBERT remained in the room, poring over the several pages of advertisements and the half-column of editorials in the *Herald*. The sun sank behind the western hills and darkness came. Eight o'clock passed, and still Nat was absent. Finally Robert got up from his cot and went to the door. At his shout the landlord's small son appeared, and Robert hired him to bring up a meal from the nearest restaurant. He ate and picked up the *Herald* again.

But when nine o'clock came and still Nat had not returned Robert's restlessness drove him first to pacing the floor; after a few moments he picked up his hat. He was

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not sleepy, and the room seemed unbearably stuffy. He looked carefully to the hang of his Colt, then went down-stairs and stepped cautiously out upon Clay Street. He intended to be very circumspect; if any of Spotten's men were looking for him, they would naturally search the saloons and gambling-hells. So he would avoid them by keeping to dark streets.

For an hour he prowled about gloomy, outlying thoroughfares, dark and almost deserted cañons under the moonless, cloud-dabbed sky. The few flickering gas lamps seemed only to intensify the surrounding blackness by contrast. He walked rapidly, with hatbrim lowered, eying each chance-met pedestrian sharply. There were few wanderers abroad, for the cheerful promise of saloons, of gambling-dens and brothels, lured most of the town's drifters.

Skirting the Plaza near the Monumental Engine House on Brenham Place, Robert halted beyond the light flung down from the upper windows. He listened half-enviously to the voices of men in the up-stairs clubroom. Then a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder and he whirled, whipping out the Colt at his hip and ramming the muzzle into his accoster's stomach.

"Whoa!" laughed the other, a brawny, red-bearded viking of a man. "You're almighty hostile, old boy. Expectin' a visitor maybe?"

"I *am* nervous, Andy," returned Robert, putting up his weapon. "I haven't many friends in town and—quite a number of most active enemies. But I thought you were still inland?"

"Struck it rich," explained Anderson, once Robert's neighbor on Deer Creek. "Homeward bound by next week's steamer. How's it been with you, Cary?"

They moved back into the darkness and leaned upon the iron fence of the Plaza. Robert was genuinely pleased to meet the big, bluff miner, and for a moment they reminisced of the days in I-Bet. Silence came then until Anderson chuckled suddenly.

"I was thinkin' o' somethin' I just heard," he explained. "Walker's got away at last!"

"Walker! I hadn't heard."

"Seein's he's been gone less'n a quarter-hour, 't ain't surprizin' you haven't. I just had the yarn from Joe Atkins, a friend o' mine. Joe was goin' to Nicaraguy with the Little Colonel, but changed his mind at the last minute an' made a pierhead jump. 'T was slick, the way Walker worked it.

"He found a friend name' Crabb, who knew the Stockton fellow holdin' the biggest claim against the brig's owner. Crabb talked this man into cancelin' his libel. That left only the claims of little merchants around town, an' everybody on the *Vesta* guessed that Lamson—by somebody's orders—had *told* 'em to enter libels. Well, Walker just hinted to Lamson that fifty-six mighty wild men aboard the *Vesta* was all-fired anxious to sail an' that if they *didn't* pretty quick, they'd sure scalp one Lamson. Lamson took the hint, an' all claims was off inside an hour."

"But the sheriff had the sails," objected Robert. "Locked 'em up to secure a three-hundred-dollar claim for 'posse expenses.' "

"Yep, he *had* 'em, but for some reason or other Sheriff Billy Reardon saw fit to return the sails at nine-thirty this mornin'. Don't ask *me* why he did. But he left a dep'ty aboard to see that Walker didn't slip out without settlin' that posse bill."

He paused to laugh, slapping his hand delightedly upon his thigh.

" 'T was good as a show, Joe says. Walker tolled the dep'ty into the cabin an' stood 'tween him an' the door.

" 'Now, sir,' drawls Walker, cooler'n a cucumber, *'there* are champagne an' cigars. *Here* are handcuffs an' leg-irons. Pray take your choice!' "

Anderson mimicked Walker's dry, precise drawl so closely that it was evident he had some acquaintance with the Little Colonel. Robert laughed.

"Well," Anderson went on, "Friend Dep'ty chose the champagne. Meantime Walker had borrowed a workin' party from the revenue-cutter *Marcy* to bend on the *Vesta's* sails. U. S. marshal was on the dock, but s' far's *he* knew all claims was settled. The old tug *Resolute* took the brig in tow about fifteen minutes ago. She should reach the Golden Gate in an hour an' a half or so—unless the *Resolute* has one o' her famous breakdowns."

Robert smiled sympathetically; he was pleased that Walker had succeeded in getting clear. His smile took on width as he pictured Spotten's face when the judge received the news. But that reminded him of his own troubles. His smile gave way to an expression of sober thoughtfulness.

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"Oh!" said Anderson abruptly. "Just remembered. Have you seen Sam Hardee today?"

"Hardee!" repeated Robert. "Why, I haven't seen Sam for months. He headed for the northern diggings when we lost our pile at I-Bet Camp."

"Funny! He must be in town. You remember Spotten, who sold you boys that salted claim? Well, I was just in the Golden Horn; an' there was Spotten with a couple rough customers. He was drinkin' more'n I ever saw him to before—not drunk, understand, but takin' enough to make him ugly—an' tellin' all the world that he'd protect himself against Sam Hardee. Seems that he'd had trouble with Sam lately; there's a duel arranged. But Spotten claims that Sam intends to shoot him on sight regardless, so he's aimin' to shoot, too.

"The gang in the saloon all sided with Spotten. Advised him to down Hardee on sight. Haven't you heard anything about the row?"

Robert made no reply. He understood only too well that Nat's suspicion of Spotten had been well-founded. Spotten was no common barroom braggart; everything *he* said in public was intended to further some definite purpose. Now by proclaiming that his life was in danger from "Hardee," Spotten would gain public sympathy in any meeting with his opponent. To try to assassinate an enemy already under challenge to a duel was so contrary to the code of gentlemen that all men must side with the judge.

"I must be going, Andy!" said Robert abruptly. "Glad to have seen you. Hope you have lots of luck hereafter. Good-by."

They shook hands, and Robert vaulted over the iron fence and crossed Portsmouth Square. He was moving toward the room. Common sense dictated avoidance of a meeting with Spotten when the judge had two shoulder-strikers at his back. Very ardently Robert was longing for sight of Nat Evarts' lanky figure and shrewd face.

He came out upon the Kearny Street sidewalk. Directly opposite him was the old Jenny Lind Theater, now the City Hall. Adjoining it on the Washington Street corner was the drab bulk of the El Dorado, California's most noted gambling-hell. From the El Dorado and kindred resorts about the Plaza came cheerful music, the sounds of gambling games, the voices of men and women.

Standing there, Robert hesitated as to which route to take. Spotten might still be in the Golden Horn a half-block distant, or he might have left that saloon for another, to stage his little act before another audience. Less than anything just then, for all his ordinary reckless disregard for odds, did Robert Cary desire to meet the judge. The moon, drifting from behind a cloud-bank, flooded the scene with white light as Robert stepped into the street and started across.

Nat Evarts at this moment was barely a block away. From an acquaintance met outside his office the Maine man had received the same account that Anderson had conveyed to Robert; had understood the situation instantly. Fearing that the reckless young Tennesseean would walk unwarned into the trap, Nat went hurriedly to their room. Finding it empty, he started at once for a round of saloons and gambling-hells.

Now he hurried up Clay Street to Kearny and turned the corner in time to see Robert in mid-street, clearly outlined, though the moon had disappeared again, in the lights of the El Dorado. As Nat opened his mouth to hail, the doors of the El Dorado swung open and Spotten, with Mex Rafferty at his elbow and another man a pace behind, stepped out upon the sidewalk.

Robert Cary's head was turned alertly toward the Jenny Lind. A group of loud-voiced men had just appeared in the entrance. He heard Nat's warning yell, and instinctively his face jerked toward the sound. Then a revolver cracked and something struck his hatbrim sharply. Automatically he whirled back toward the El Dorado; without conscious thought he jerked his Colt. As it came to hip-level he had a flashing glimpse of Spotten, as if the judge stood in the foreground of a picture. Then Robert was shooting as fast as he could squeeze trigger.

Spotten's second bullet sang across the Plaza, for a heavy ball had caught him in the right breast even as he fired and spun him sidewise. He leaned far to the right for an instant, then toppled face down upon the planked walk. Mex Rafferty's Colt crashed to the planks in the same moment, for Robert's third bullet had struck it.

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The shoulder-striker groaned agonizedly and wrung his numbed hand.

Then Nat Evarts streaked into the street, and Robert sensed that a long-barreled revolver had appeared in his friend's hand. At sight of Nat the second follower of Spotten whirled and leaped for the El Dorado's door. A bullet from Nat's Remington, striking the wall to his right, hardened his resolution to escape.

Robert felt strong fingers encircle his arm and move him resistlessly toward the corner of the gambling-house. Rafferty, without pausing to pick up his Colt and still holding up his gun hand with his left, had leaped toward the doorway also, shouting that Spotten had been murdered. Men surged toward the sidewalk as Robert and Nat rounded the corner of Washington Street. A sudden menacing roar, wordless yet meaningful; the blood-cry of a potential mob, sent cold chills playing along Robert Cary's spine. For a monent his mouth went dry; panic gripped him; such blind terror as a man might feel when empty-handed he hears behind him the wolf-pack.

THEN the haze that had come with the lightning interchange of shots dissolved. His lips tightened to a white line across his whiter face. The "Cary jaw" stiffened and his eyes were like narrow bits of polished metal.

"Run!" gasped Nat, and they took to their heels, plunging instantly through a zone of inky darkness.

But only for a third of a block. Then Nat shot out a long arm and jerked his companion to a halt. There was the grate of a key in a heavy lock; Nat hauled him into a doorway, scarce blacker than the gloom of the whole street. A burst of shots came from the corner they had just quitted; again that beast-roar from many throats. Bullets whined vaguely past them; then the door swung to.

"Warehouse!" panted Nat. "Half-dozen of us rent this cubby-hole to keep our spare gear in. Lucky 't was here. Listen!"

Down the hollow-echoing plank sidewalk outside the door came pounding feet with accompaniment of yelling voices:

"Lynch him! Lynch the murderer!"

"Split at the corner!" bellowed a hoarse voice, which Robert Cary *knew*, rather than recognized, as Mex Raffert's. "You —— fools! Split! Half go one way, half the other, on Montgomery! They can't get away. Some o' you watch the docks; some the Mission Road! There'll be —— to pay if they slip us!"

"Mex has brains!" whispered Nat Evarts. "That *does* sort o' block us."

"Then we're bottled up?" Robert's voice had steadied now.

"Those are the only ways out of town—about. We might make a break toward the outskirts somewhere and come into the road beyond the Mission. Trouble is, by this time every ruffian in town's circulating about; liable to run on to 'em anywhere. Prospect of a lynching-bee's too attractive for 'em to pass up. Let's see——"

"Look here, Nat!" said Robert emphatically. "This is my private row. I've dragged you into it far enough. We'll slip out of here, and I'll go one way, you another. I'll not let you risk your life. It isn't fair."

"Keep quiet! I'm thinking."

"I'll not! This is my funeral——"

"*Will* you be still? I haven't had so much fun in ages. Can you sail a boat?"

"No!" snapped Robert impatiently. "But——"

"Well, I can! Learned on Penobscot. I've got a scheme. Now, Bobby, save your breath. If I hadn't poked along at the Mission this evening, this wouldn't have happened. So I'm going to get you out of town. That gang would string you to a lamp-post if they laid hands on you. Listen now! I'm going to open the door."

They put their heads out cautiously, but Washington Street thereabout lay quiet as a tomb. They were midway between Kearny and Montgomery Streets, and in both directions not a light was to be seen. Nat sighed vastly; then they stepped out side, and the door was relocked.

"Across quick!" Nat commanded.

They scurried over and gained the shelter of the buildings on the opposite side.

"Now come along! If we meet the general public, act natural. But if we run on to any of Rafferty's crowd—well, it'll be heels, not guns, we'd better show!"

Robert smiled. The tenseness, the danger, were as potent quickeners of the pulse as alcohol. From cavalier ancestors he derived capacity for derring-do. He felt nothing now but a pleasant tingling excitement; a sort of "before-the-battle" thrill. There came to him as they skulked along

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building-faces, memory of tales told by an uncle little older than himself, who had been a lieutenant in the Mexican War; tales of scouting along the Mexican front.

Robert placed his feet with careful noiselessness; capture here meant, not a bullet, but a hangman's noose. Therefore he would not be caught.

They slipped around the corner of Montgomery Avenue and moved along the sandy track for a short distance to the northwest, then angled west. There were few people on these gloomy, sand-paved streets; those who met them went by without sign of interest. Each time they stiffened, with hands very near their weapons, then sighed and relaxed. Presently on the beachward slope of Russian Hill, they caught the sharp, pungent odor of the Bay, adulterated with the smell of rotting fish and garbage.

"We're headed for Meiggs' Wharf," Nat explained. "Friend of mine has a sloop there. We'll sail across to Sausalito and get you a horse, then you can ride north to San Rafael and ferry across the Bay. Best scheme I can figure. You've *got* to skip!'

They moved quietly down Taylor Street, through a section of fishermen's ramshackle huts. All these were dark, but the yellow windows of occasional sailor dives were guiding beacons.

They were nearing a huddle of shacks when three men rushed from the darkness. One, in advance of his companions, peered at them intently, then raised a triumphant yell. It was cut short instantly by Robert's fist, but the others closed in.

There was no time to use firearms. Nat's long arms swung like pile-drivers, and the man opposite him dropped. Robert, clinging desperately to his opponent's right wrist, searched for the man's chin with smashing uppercuts; found it at last and the man crumpled. Then they turned and fled.

From the ground behind them, where lay the tumbled ruffians, came a spit of orange flame and a snapping report. Robert sprawled to hands and knees, then got up and ran on.

"Hurt?" yelled Nat.

"Not much. Can limp," Robert gritted.

But he knew that the light bullet had lodged in the bone of his thigh. He could feel a warm trickling down his leg, plastering clothing to skin. The first sting of the wound vanished, quickly replaced by a pulsating pain like that of a neuralgic tooth. His pace slackened, but grimly he hobbled onward.

A single shack loomed ahead. Nat threw an arm around his friend's shoulders and helped him to the wall. Robert leaned against the building, feeling his strength ebbing with the leak of blood down his leg.

Unceremoniously but with fingers deft in spite of their seeming roughness, Nat stripped down the trousers and felt the bullet-hole. His coat came off; his shirt followed. He ripped the linen garment into strips and devised a crude tourniquet and bandage.

"Can you hobble along now, Bobby?" he grunted, hiding the anxiety in his voice under a shell of gruffness.

The bruised bone throbbed maddeningly; the whole leg seemed rhythmically to expand and contract. But there was no lack of pride in the Carys; sometimes it led them into foolish tangles, but now Robert's share dragged him upright, even brought a twisted grin.

"Of course!" he snapped tartly, moving a step to prove it.

Globules of sweat burst from his forehead to attest the effort's cost. There was an icy patch at his stomach-pit that revolved. He had a foolish fancy that if he laid hand upon it he would find the muscles circling like a wheel; he was gripped by the beginning of nausea. He bit his pale lips and moved forward.

"Come on!" he panted.

Nat drew Robert's arm about his neck and in this fashion they stumbled down-hill and out upon the seemingly miles-long Meiggs' Wharf. Near the dock-end, bobbing on the swells within a few feet of each other, lay two sloops, dimly white in the darkness. Utter stillness gripped land and water, save that, far away toward Telegraph Hill, a dog barked shrilly and persistently, as if in warning to their enemies.

Robert swayed dizzily upon the dock-edge, then the cool, tonic breeze smote his face revivifyingly. He clenched his hands fiercely as he watched Nat disappear over the wharf, to drop into the cockpit of the nearest craft. Then, from the shelter of a pile of merchandise, came a big man, moving silently until he stumbled upon a splintered plank. Robert wheeled mechanically, confronting the approaching figure Colt in hand.

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"What you doin' in that boat?" demanded the newcomer surlily.

"Friends of Jimmy Vantine," came Nat's muffled reply. "Going to take out the *Sheila*. Who're you?"

"Watchman. Come out o' that! That ain't the *Sheila*. 'S the *Curlew*."

"All right! Boats look alike in the dark, you know."

Deliberately the Maine man scrambled upon the wharf again. With Robert and the watchman accompanying, he moved forward to the other sloop and cast off the lines, securing the sloop by a single turn about a cleat. As Robert poised for descent, there came running feet upon the dockhead; quick, triumphant yells and a warning cry to the watchman.

"Hold 'em, Sam!"

Even through the haze that threatened momentarily to engulf him, Robert recognized the hoarse voice of Mex Rafferty. Sam, the watchman, moved like a doll upon a string. He dived at Robert with long arms outflung. But Nat Evarts, coming up from a squat in a single catapulting spring, banged his hard fists in crashing alternation against Sam's chin. The watchman crumpled to the planks without a groan and lay still.

Nat picked up Robert bodily and swung him over the dock into the cockpit. A staccato fusillade reechoed from the sandhills back of North Beach; bullets whined overhead as Nat cast off the single line and tumbled after.

Fortunately they had barely a dozen feet to cover before the *Sheila* cleared dock-end and the offshore breeze took her. Nat shoved off frantically, then two-blocked the gaff in a single jerk by swinging bodily upon the mainsail halyards. Rafferty and his followers sprinted to the wharf-foot and fired a hasty volley that only dimpled the water about the sloop. Then they ran back and tumbled into the *Curlew*.

Nat laughed grimly as he cocked an eye at the bellying mainsail. He scrambled for'ard and hoisted the jib, then returned to take the tiller. Robert still lay where he had fallen. Nat dropped the tiller to scoop double handfuls of icy salt water from overside. Again and again he doused Robert until the latter sat up, spluttering.

"*Curlew's* got the heels of this tub ordinarily," observed Nat cheerfully, resuming the tiller. "But unless they notice the bucket I dropped over their stern, bent to the stern-painter, she won't catch the *Sheila* this night!"

Sure enough, the *Sheila*, gathering way in a steady breeze from Golden Gate, forged ahead. Then a burst of yells and the *Curlew's* increased speed told them that the dragging bucket had been discovered and cut free. But they had fully two hundred yards' lead now. Short of unforeseen accident, the *Curlew* could hardly overtake them before reaching Sausalito on the Marin shore. Nat laughed, then broke off with a sudden oath to peer intently ahead.

Out of the thick darkness beyond them loomed a dim, silent bulk. Nothing more than some ship on her way out to the Golden Gate, but— The *Sheila*, going sharply to starboard to cut under the vessel's counter, must lose way. The *Curlew*, under no such necessity, would cut down the lead to almost nothing—perhaps overtake them. Nat sighed resignedly and proved himself a man of action no less than a lover of peace by drawing his revolver.

"Guess we're in for a rumpus, Bobby," he called. "Time we pass this strolling packet they'll be alongside."

ROBERT turned with an effort and stared. The outbound vessel, moving deliberately at this moment of 'tween-tides, was within a few feet now. Nat held a direct course to the last possible moment, then jammed the tiller hard-a-larboard and the *Sheila* began to coast down the black side. The *Curlew* had crawled up to within fifty yards now and the gang was yelling.

"—— this ballyhoo!" growled Nat. "Couldn't pick another time to stand out."

Save for the creak of the rigging and a muffled panting from the starboard side, that told of a tug, it might have been a fantom vessel, the *Flying Dutchman* itself. Robert twirled his Colt on a forefinger and stared upward lethargically. The imminence of what might be his final struggle had no effect on him; he felt an odd placidity, as if, while gripped by a nightmare, he could decide with some unused brain-lobe that it was only a dream.

Then with theatrical suddenness the moon sailed from behind a cloud-bank; everything on land and water leaped into brilliant relief. To westward, between the twin headlands of Diablo and Fort Point,

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yawned the Golden Gate, with a silvery path of moonlight through the cleft from Bay to blue Pacific. The vessel's side was black with heads. As if in mocking salute to the moonrise a clear, high tenor voice rose:

"Oh, thet brig, the *Vesta!*
Oh, thet brig——"

Robert's brain cleared magically at the sound. He stood up, clinging to the side.

"It's—it's Walker!" he cried, hope and incredulity blended in his voice. "Of course! The *Vesta* only left Steuart Street an hour or so ago, and that's four miles back. I'd forgotten all that——"

A volley came from the *Curlew*. A bullet or two thudded into the brig's side. Then a gaunt, menacing figure in buckskin coat leaped like a great cat to the bulwark, outlined sharply in the moonlight. A long arm stabbed out toward the *Curlew*.

"In the boat thar!" bellowed Tex Bryant. "Colonel Walker's compliments, an' if you fire jest *once more* we'll metagrobolize you!"

Nat had jerked the tiller to starboard; brought the *Sheila* rasping along the *Vesta's* side. He dropped the mainsail and clung to the brig's larboard main-chains.

"Get aboard, Bobby!" he panted exultantly. "Quick! Put yourself under Walker's protection. Don't worry about me—" Robert had begun a protest "—I'll be gone before they get here. Once in town they don't dare touch me; my friends are too powerful. Jump!"

Tex Bryant after a swift, identifying glance downward, dropped to the outer molding of the bulwark. He clung there, extending a long arm; hauled Robert upward. Robert had forgotten his wound. He scrambled aboard and found himself surrounded by grinning, blue-shirted men; turned and saw Nat steering the *Sheila* in an arc that was taking her back toward North Beach. The *Curlew* was coming alongside the *Vesta;* Nat was safe.

Walker's solitary figure stood at the after companion. Before Robert could move in that direction there was a thump from overside and a burly figure swarmed over the bulwark. Mex Rafferty leaped at Robert, but a revolver appeared in Tex Bryant's hand. Mex ran squarely into the muzzle and recoiled with a pained oath.

"*Easy* does it, fellow!" drawled the Texan menacingly. "Vis'tors always see the Little Colonel 'fore they start any fireworks!"

Rafferty leaped across to where Walker stood impassive, as if no strange figures had invaded his decks unheralded.

"Walker, I'm a deputy sheriff!" cried Rafferty furiously. "I'm after a murderer. If you ain't hunting trouble with the sheriff, tell that monkey yonder to step aside!"

Robert Cary felt a flask pushed into his hand.

"Take a big drink, younker!" grinned Tex Bryant. "You're white's a ghost."

Robert drank and returned the bottle, feeling almost normal again. Bryant motioned toward the companion, and Robert limped across the deck and halted near Rafferty.

"A murderer? On the *Vesta?*"

Walker's round eyes mirrored innocent amazement.

"This fellow! He shot Judge Spotten. Shot him in the back. Judge wasn't heeled."

Walker stared blankly at Robert Cary for an instant.

"Come aside with me!" he commanded, and led the way to the starboard bulwark while Rafferty watched uneasily, but refrained from following.

"Tell me everything quickly!" snapped Walker, and Robert explained briefly.

Walker listened impassively, nodded at the end and stood staring thoughtfully over the water for a moment. Then he wheeled abruptly upon Rafferty.

"Rafferty!" he said slowly, raising his voice. "As a lawyer and a law-abiding citizen I would not for any consideration shield a murderer. You may take this man!"

Rafferty's frown vanished. His lips curled in malignant triumph as he whirled upon Robert with right hand flashing toward his coat pocket.

"In the name of the law, I arrest——"

Then a ring of steel pressed his stomach.

"Bring out both your derringers, Rafferty! Keep them muzzle down. There! Now, put your hands together—slowly! Don't move now, or you'll never move again."

When he held both derringers in his left hand Robert transferred them to a coat pocket. From beneath Rafferty's cutaway he jerked a Navy revolver, then backed swiftly to the mainmast and grinned tightly

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upon the spectators. Walker watched imperturbably, as if viewing some thrilling drama in the theater.

"Now, Rafferty, if you want me—come get me! Bring your gang! Perhaps I'll go back, but you'll go with me, and one pine box will clothe us both. Come on!"

Rafferty's face showed almost black in the moonlight. His thick body trembled with unleashed rage. But he made no move to brave that ominous muzzle. Instead he turned savagely upon the moveless Walker.

"—— you! You planned this! You——"

"Sh! Sh! Not so loud!" drawled Bryant in his ear. "There's men asleep for'-'ard!"

"I planned nothing!" came Walker's cold, flat denial. "Blame your own clumsiness, Rafferty. A deputy so slow with weapons is a singularly poor man to send after a murderer."

"You'll pay for this!" snarled Rafferty. "You have to get supplies from here, Walker. We'll see that you don't! We'll see if you can buck the sheriff's office. We——"

"Softly! You disturb my thoughts. You want this man? Well, I may reasonably inquire how you plan to get him?"

"I've got a posse below. I'll bring my men up and get him—dead or kicking!"

"Not so fast. I can't accept your word that it's a posse. They may be questionable characters, and in justice to my—ah—peaceful colonists I can't take chances."

The "Fifty-Five" looked furtively at one another. They were to gain world-wide fame as the most desperate warriors of their century; even now they grinned sardonically at their commander's words; feeling entirely capable of handling six or eight apiece of Rafferty's shoulder-strikers.

"Of course," Walker went on meditatively, "my own men might capture this fugitive and deliver him into your boat. Would that satisfy you of my law-abiding intent?"

"Sure!" beamed Rafferty, struggling with his astonishment. "You—you don't want to get in bad with the authorities. Lend me a hand, and I promise a good word for you."

Robert Cary had listened in bewilderment, scarce crediting his ears. Walker would turn him over to Rafferty's lynchers; Walker, who had been so friendly! It was unbelievable.

Then he recalled all he had heard of the little man's unwavering determination, once his course was charted. It was said that *nothing* could swerve this icy leader a hair's breadth; make him lose sight of his own interest. Given an expedition to Nicaragua, reenforcements and supplies must be drawn chiefly from San Francisco. Walker might well feel very hesitant to offend local authorities who would later take revenge by cutting off supplies.

Robert's jaw tightened grimly. He raised the revolver-muzzle a trifle so that it covered Rafferty. At the first move toward him of any man he would account for the leader at least. Then a curt whisper reached his ear.

"Trust the Little Colonel," counseled Tex Bryant, "an' have another drink!"

"Now just as a matter of form," Robert heard Walker say as Tex took the flask again, "let me see your warrant."

Walker's tone was pleasant, almost genial.

"Warrant!" stammered Rafferty. "Why—I—uh—I didn't have time to get one. Don't need one in a murder case anyway, you know."

"No warrant!"

Walker's tone proclaimed surprize, even a dawning suspicion. Rafferty caught the significance of the intonation. He smiled more widely.

"You see, colonel," he said with assumption of bluff heartiness, "we took after this fellow soon's we saw him shoot the judge. He dodged us, and we didn't catch up until just now. But it's all right. Sure! Now, if you'll have him disarmed for me——"

"No warrant!" said Walker again. "*Hmm!* But you—know him, beyond a doubt?"

"Oh, sure! As well as if he were my brother. He'd made threats against the judge, you see. Between you and me, Spotten was nervous. Figured on asking protection from our office. Oh, I know him well enough! Seen him several times."

"And his name is——"

Rafferty hesitated. Robert stared with creased brows. There was an undercurrent here he could not fathom. What difference would Rafferty's naming him make, anyway? His frown deepened.

Then he remembered something. He waited tensely. Walker's mind, he knew, was geared for lightning calculation.

"Why, his name is—uh—*Hardee!* Sam Hardee."

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Rafferty mopped his forehead with a relieved sigh.

"—— ! Thought I'd forgotten it for a minute. Remember now the judge said: "'Sam Hardee's come down from Deer Creek. He's threatened my life on sight.' Oh, he's the man, colonel, without a doubt!"

A sudden flashing smile appeared on Walker's harsh face. He fairly beamed on the deputy.

"I'm *very* glad you remembered all this, Rafferty," he smiled. "*Now* I can be of real assistance to you. You see, you've made a grave mistake in identity, and I'm pleased to set you right. This man isn't Hardee, and so can't be the man you seek."

"Not Hardee! Say, Walker, what kind o' game's this? Didn't I tell you——"

"His name is—Robert Cary. Lieutenant in my force. Either he's that, or—" Walker was steadily regarding Robert now—"I don't know him from Adam. Lieutenant Robert Cary, the fifty-sixth member of my expedition. Reprehensibly late, I may remark, in joining."

Complete light burst upon Robert Cary then. He suppressed a grin. Walker was playing a game no less upon him than upon Mex Rafferty, and both were helpless to object. It was good-by to California that he said, but the humor of the thing tickled him.

He could not help admiring Walker's novel method of recruiting him. Nor had he any doubt that if he denied his membership in the expedition Walker would disavow all interest in him; leave him to get out of the scrape as best he might. More, he admitted this flashingly, he had all along *wanted* to go to Nicaragua; only his promise to Nat—now waived—had kept him from joining as soon as Walker had invited him. So he grinned shadowily.

"You see, Rafferty," he drawled without lowering the revolver, "you were mistaken. I *am* Lieutenant Robert Cary. Lieutenant Bryant here can identify me."

"Glad to!" grinned Tex Bryant. "Lieutenant Cary an' me are mighty good friends."

"You see?" smiled Walker. "I'm *very* glad that you're set right, Rafferty. Now of course, you're anxious to be gone after the real murderer, this man—ah—Hardee. So, good night! Bryant, show the deputy to the side. We're nearing the Gate."

Rafferty would have burst out furiously then, but a long, steely hand closed about his arm, numbing it from shoulder to elbow. Inexorably he was propelled to the bulwark and helped upon it. Tex sneaked a glance at Walker, saw that he had turned to Robert Cary, and helped Rafferty into the *Curlew* with a tremendous kick.

Two men lifted Robert from where he had sagged suddenly to the deck, fainted now since the strain was past. Walker motioned them toward the companion leading into the officers' quarters.

WHEN Robert Cary opened his eyes he found himself in a narrow bunk that was one of a tier encircling a low-ceiled, gloomy cabin. A flickering oil-lamp, hung in gimbals from the deck above, pallidly lit the space. Busy with rearrangement of bandages and scissors in a worn black case was a melancholy-faced man, who met Robert's questioning stare with gloomy eyes.

"I'm Dr. Alex Jones," said this man in funereal tones. "You'll be all right, I guess—unless you take a turn for the worse. You're to lie quiet until I tell you to get up—if it's a month."

He snapped his case shut and went out. From overhead came the sound of running feet upon the deck; sailor-cries and the creak of running-rigging through the blocks. The *Vesta's* bows climbed sharply; fell, reared up again.

Robert recognized the surge of ocean-swells upon the bar beyond the Golden Gate. He was faint from loss of blood and excitement, but his brain seemed unusually clear and alert. He lay with hands clasped beneath his head and regarded with a slow smile the dark wood above him.

No premonition came of the strange, peril-beset paths he was to tread for two years; of the hair-breadth 'scapes to befall him, before he set eager foot upon the soil of his own land again. The manner of his enlistment still amused him.

"A lieutenant of Cæsar—or Napoleon—or William Walker—willy-nilly," he muttered. Then he laughed softly.

"Oh, well——"

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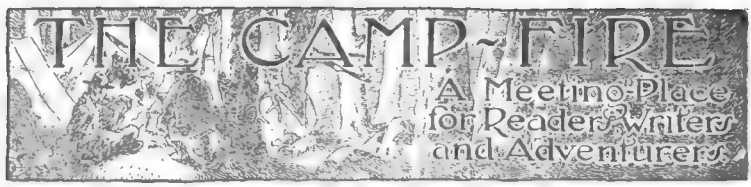

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

SNAKES and lizards. E. E. Harriman of "A. A." and our writers' brigade talking. Yes, "Inky Legion" is a good name for our writers' brigade; it can stand two of 'em. Wish some of you would suggest a good name for all of us; some of you don't like "comrade" because they say it suggests the Bolshevists, I.W.W., etc. Still, it's a pity if a good word like "comrade" is to be preempted by any one group. We are all comrades at Camp-Fire and surely have a right to use the name if we like. But any other friendly name will do as well. Any suggestions? I'm not strong for "Mr." among us, but frequently use it at Camp-Fire to avoid any seeming of freshness or disrespect. You need never hang a "Mr." on my name, by the way. Lots of you address me as A. S. H. in your letters and I like it O.K. In letters to you I nearly always use "Mr." for the same reason I use it at Camp-Fire. In a dictated letter it often creeps in even with those of you with whom I've long since passed the "Mr." stage—I forget to say to leave it out and so in it goes sometimes. Oh well, I'm just talking along and all I mean to say is that I'm ag'in' formality wherever it can be dropped without disrespect.

Any good substitute for "comrade"?

Los Angeles.

Reading in Camp-Fire for February 18th something more about snakes that break apart, I am moved to put in my oar. Joint snakes, glass snakes or whatever you choose to call them are a fact—only—they are not snakes at all. They look like snakes, but are really lizards.

THEY are lizards without legs, moving as snakes move, living on the same foods, yet they are classed as lizards by scientists. They are named *Ophiosaurus ventralis*. Their cousin who lives in Russia, Hungary and Dalmatia is called by scientists *Pseudopus pallasi*. The natives call him Scheltopusik. Both these cousins look glassy, with this difference: the Dalmatian is dark brownish. The bloomin' Hamerican is greenish. Both grow new tails when the old one is lost.

Now about our common lizard of California. One took up his domicile in a lumber-pile beside my house once. In turning over the pile to select a board I wanted, I cut his tail off. He never left the pile and two months later he had two inches of new tail, still considerably thinner than the old one yet,

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but growing right along. He was still there at Christmas, with his tail almost perfect once more. In all, I think that I showed him to my children at least half a dozen times, to let them see what progress his new tail had made.

Perhaps you Camp-Fire fellows remember my snake with a thorn for a tip to his tail. Zesbaugh of Minneapolis wrote you about killing one like it. Roe of Mayer, Arizona, wrote me last year that he killed one like mine in Massachusetts and folks called it horned copperhead. Perhaps it was Zesbaugh that gave that name, though. Anyhow, Roe got a snake like mine. Glad two men back me up.

Schaefer is right, backed up by the snakeologists. He's a lizard. Robertson's Inky Legion is good.—E. E. HARRIMAN.

SOMETHING from J. H. Greene in connection with his story in this issue:

Provincetown, Mass.

I have seen the wood related in west Australia, packed for shipment to Chinese ports, and have often spoilt my bread by getting a log of it on my camp-fire.

The other woods are also there as well as the dry lakes and salt rivers.

The whaling ship is described from the *Chas. W. Morgan* of New Bedford now being used in the pictures, "Down to the Sea in Ships" and "Java Head."

White men going native is not new in Australian history.

Also I have seen here a jackplane made of that wood; the old ship carpenter who had it told me it was often used for such purposes.—J. H. GREENE.

IS THERE among us "Shorty," formerly of the *Zacapa, Roanoke* and *New Hampshire* and others? This letter has been in our cache some time, but maybe the writer is still to be reached at the address given.

Waterbury, Connecticut.

Dear Camp-Fire: I often read small articles of old-timers in your columns so I am hoping that you will not refuse me these few words about a regular fellow, which I call a young old-timer. Any fellow that was ever a steamer or sailing-launch coxswain in the Navy will tell you that it is not any bed of roses.

The fellow I was speaking about, a fellow we called "Shorty," whose real name I do not know, was one of the best coxswains that ever held a tiller. I first met him at the Seamans Institute in 1916; he was due to sail out with the *Zacapa*, of the U. F. Co. That fellow sure had some spunk. I saw him get into an argument with one of those wharf rats, which every sailor meets around the piers, and with the disadvantage of about 60 lbs. against him he put up a good fight, and I am sure would have come out victor if the cop had not showed up. He beat it and got away. I tried to see him again, but the *Zacapa* had sailed.

Then came the war in '17, and I met him in the outfit. He was wearing the rate of coxswain, and I stopped to have a talk with him, but at that time we were interfered with by his wife meeting up with him, which stopped me from explaining where I had seen him before and getting better acquainted with him. I was in the outfit also, so I had hopes of meeting him again, which I did, but just for a few minutes and not long enough for an acquaintance. He was coxswain of the U.S.S. *Roanoke's* 1st Motor Sailor, when she made the game fight for it in the Firth Cromarty, Scotland. There was several seagoing tugs of the British Navy that suffered out there, and many big ones were near calamity, but that lad stood up with a 35-foot motor-launch, against seas high enough to swamp the best of them, and a gale above 90 miles per hour, and successfully reached his ship. I am sure that he was the only one to get back to ship after the storm broke that night.

A fellow from the *Roanoke* told me that "Shorty" had served with the machine-gun platoon of the *New Hampshire* in the occupation of Vera Cruz, Mexico, and with the landing force in San Domingo, also in Haiti, and some time before with some French outfit in Algiers. He is a scarred-up little scrapper and I would admire him as a pal. The fellow that told me about him said he did not know his real name, as he had just come aboard the *Roanoke* some few weeks ago, and Shorty was then a boatswain's mate.

I would like to know if any fellow could tell me his real name besides "Shorty." If there is any fellow of you that knows his real name I would appreciate it a lot. Yours for the open road.—EDWARD B. MARTIN, c/o General Delivery, Waterbury, Conn.

SOMETHING from H. Bedford-Jones in connection with his story in this issue:

Certain elements of this story were gleaned from Ossendowski's splendid book, "Beasts, Men and Gods." I have used his explanation of the runic black stone, and his theory regarding the secret of the deadly sacred mountain. He recounts an interesting story about Czar Alexander and the original black stone; which see if interested. The Feodor Musvitch yarn is of course very well known as an unsolved historical mystery.

HOW did the dog do it? Here's a wireless apparatus for you. Only you're hardly likely to be able to receive on it.

New York.

Being a woman, I want to start a discussion. I am called a psychologist. Not sure that I am one but rather interested in what I term the power of mind over matter and the missing sixth sense in human beings. Is it possible to develope this sense—which I would call that of intuition—and do animals, especially dogs, possess this sense?

I GIVE herewith an illustration which would seemingly claim that dogs, especially some kinds of dogs, do to a very large extent possess an intuition or instinct which might provoke the envy of man.

My father owned an old hound dog. Don't know the exact breed. Guess he was *just hound* and trained to hunt deer. I remember that he was

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rather long of body, not too tall on his feet. Had a slender head but a very, very pronounced bump on forehead. Long ears. Used to delight in pulling those ears. Dog liked it, too. They, the ears, where long, drooping and just like the finest kind of silk velvet. The name of this hound dog was Nebuchadnezzar, and we called him Neb.

Now Neb had been trained never to follow any one but father. Simply could not be coaxed to follow any one else. We lived about seven miles from Little Rock, Arkansas, at this time. Some mile and a half in our rear was a place called Ink Bayou and near this bayou grew the choicest of blackberries. One day a girl friend of mine named Etta R. and I were sent to this spot to obtain a pail of the berries for pies. When we reached the bayou patch we found that the berries here were not well ripened and so decided to look around for another and sunnier patch where the berries would have ripened. We were only about eight years of age, and kept going on and on until we at last came to a cane-brake. Just then we heard the *gobble, gobble* of a wild turkey. "Oh, oh!" said we, "would it not be just wonderful if two little girls could catch a wild turkey!" Maybe we would be lucky enough to run upon a mother turkey and get hold of some nice fat little turkey chicks. So on we traveled deeper and deeper into that wild cane-brake, until at last Etta said that she wondered how far we were from home.

BY THIS time we realized that we were lost. Lost in a wild cane-brake. You who have traveled much can give a guess how bad this seemed to two little girls. We had no dog with us, although we had never gone so far from home before without a dog to accompany us and protect us from the hogs that fed upon the mast in the woods. Had we had a dog with us he might have led us out of the cane-brake and to our home, but this day we had no such wise canine friend to guide us. Etta began crying. I did not cry. Guess I was too badly scared for crying but I remembered something I had heard father and old Dr. Dunagan tell about a dog's intuition. I told Etta that if Neb was there we would be all right. She said, "But we haven't got Neb. Now what will we do?"

I said, "Let's call Neb. Maybe if his hearing is so good as they say a hound's hearing is, he will hear us and come." Then we began calling as loud as ever little child's lungs could call.

NOW it's a fact that after we had started berrying father decided to go over near the lead-mines, about twelve miles away from home and in the opposite direction from that in which was the cane-brake. We learned afterward that the cane-brake was five miles from home. This would make where father was deer hunting about seventeen miles away.

About five o'clock in the afternoon father said that Neb suddenly stopped dead in his tracks and, with uplifted muzzle, sniffed the air, turning his head first one way then another, and seemed to be listening. All at once he gave tongue and started off toward home. Father followed, thinking that Neb was on the track of a deer. That night about nine o'clock Neb led father and a searching party straight to the spot in the very center of the wild cane-brake where two little girls lay asleep, having worked themselves into a state of exhaustion. Neb would have reached the place sooner only that father, not understanding what had possessed that hound, kept holding him back until he reached home and learned that Etta and I were lost.

Tell me, now, how that dog knew? Could he hear that far away? No. Did he smell us? Or was his the gift of a sixth sense which led him to know that he was needed five miles back of old Ink Bayou and in the midst of a cane-brake where the canes were so tall that not even a grown man could have seen above the tops? It's a problem for psychologists and for a something yet undiscovered by man.

With best wishes to you all.—MRS. AGNES MAE GLASGOW.

SOMETHING from Eugene Cunningham about the central character in his story in this issue:

San Francisco, California.

The little man has gripped my imagination strongly since my time in Guatemala City, when Lee Christmas—himself said to be "no slouch" at filibustering—said, "By ——! That Walker was a man!" Coming from Lee, it impressed me.—EUGENE CUNNINGHAM.

A STRONG letter on that proposed national anti-weapon law, that imbecile attempt to cure an evil by making it worse:

Tampa, Florida.

Your fight against the movement to disarm the citizens and place them still more at the mercy of the thug should have the active support of every one who has an ounce of brains. Only the abolition of punishment for crime could be more in the favor of the thug than the disarmament of the people who would obey such a law.

IF SUCH a law should be passed, the present law-abiding citizens would be divided into two classes; those who would surrender their weapons and become helpless and those who would defy or evade the law and become additional law-breakers. The thieves and thugs would always have a reserve supply and know where to arm themselves. It is useless bunk to say "confiscate their weapons." How are you going to do so? Every rat-hole and loose board might become a hide-out. Those whom society would most deserve to disarm are the ones who now sit in defiance by their crimes. It is absolute idiocy to think they will walk up and surrender their means of terrorism.

In an attempt to legislate out of existence all things that might become a deadly weapon, we might have to discard the bandanna or lead-pencil. A stone tied up in the one or a thrust in the eye with the other could very easily cause death.

WE HAVE too many granny law-makers who think the passage of a law will cure any evil. Our trouble is in the courts with their technicalities all in the favor of the criminal—their slack punishments and the excessively free use of pardons.

Every mob seeking the life of a criminal is a protest against the inadequate punishment given by the courts and an expression of the belief that the very slackness they seek to remedy will permit

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them to escape any penalty for their usurpation of power.

The punishment prescribed by law should be deterrent. If it does not prevent crime in a very large measure, the severity of the punishment should be increased until crimes decrease. If courts will not adequately punish them, the citizens will and in this again break laws. I am not an advocate of mobs but I have known cases where I would very much hesitate to condemn them. It is not law that is to blame in most of these cases but tricky, hair-splitting technicalities provided by lawyers.

As a remedy for the so-called "wave of violence," instead of being absurd and trying to confiscate weapons, make it a death penalty or life imprisonment to attempt any crime where any weapon or instrument was used or shown in any attempt to commit violence or terrorize the victim and in the escape of the criminal. I would carry this construction to the point where the use of an automobile in forcing a way through a crowd by a criminal would become a deadly weapon.

I would limit pardoning power to cases where new evidence showed the innocence of the one convicted.—MACK.

BE MARKING down your favorite stories for our annual vote by readers on the best fiction published in the magazine during the year. Mark down the stories as you go along and send us the list at the end of the year. We want to print the sort of fiction you like and this is the only way in which we can find what that sort is.

IN CONNECTION with their story in this issue Everett Saunders and Edison Fowler follow Camp-Fire custom and arise to introduce themselves. Mr. Saunders has been here before:

Nampa, Idaho.

I am glad that this is a Camp-Fire meeting, and absolutely informal, because I am the least proficient after-dinner talker in captivity. I am more at home in the bunch beside a camp-fire helping cuss the smoke, which—contrary to the general belief—does not follow and torment with impish persistence the most handsome man present, but veers with the vagrant winds and spares no one, handsome or not.

NOW I have changed my mind; I will not introduce myself. If you will look in a certain number of *Adventure* four years old or so you will find some fairly veracious dope about me, easily believed because I didn't claim to have pulled anything very hero-like or dramatic. There is no need to mention the date of the issue because there is not a chance in the world that so old a copy of the magazine could be dug up. I imagine I have about the only one extant. I placed three yarns with *Adventure* about that time, "The Silver Saddle," "The Chuckawalla Kid," and "Shep's Decision."

So fleeting is fame.

To while away that intruding four years I have done a very little writing and much living, most of my adventure being psychological—if that means anything. Now I have a girl growing up who must soon be given the opportunity of learning piano, and a boy who must be taught to box, play baseball and—his mother avers—the violin.

I AM glad to be again beside the Camp-Fire, either in the guise of reader, writer, or adventurer—it doesn't matter which. It's a good gang of good fellows. And I wish, in all sincerity, to do what many have done before and will again, offer the hand of good-fellowship to Mr. Hoffman and his associate editors. I have met them only through the Camp-Fire and some personal letters, but I know they are men first and editors afterward. Here's lookin' at yuh.—EVERETT SAUNDERS.

Nampa, Idaho.

I discovered America in the State of Tennessee something less than thirty years ago, and at the early age of one year came West. Since that inauspicious day I have tried my hand at a few of the things that a man may do and still stay out of the penitentiary and the state legislature. I have gone to school, prospected, done newspaper work, taught school, mined and ranched. I have even served a short apprenticeship as a plumber, and might by this time have been a full-fledged joint-wiper had I not persisted in remembering, despite frequent warnings from my boss, to take with me from the shop all the necessary tools. This, of course, prevented any of the extra trips which come under the plumber's prerogative—so at last I was discharged as hopeless. Then I started in to help Uncle Sam lick Germany, and got one flat foot and one cold one doing bayonet practice.

AT THE present time I am teaching school again. My early ambitions painted for me a career with seven thousand bright youngsters and two-hundred-eighty winsome young lady lieutenants under my leadership. But my experience of the past year with two hundred youngsters and five of the aforementioned lieutenants has pointed my ambitions back to an isolated rocky cañon with *one* meekly obedient burro under my supervision and pack.

As an indication of which part of my mildly checkered career has proven most interesting, I might say that I have never thus far attempted to write a story about school teaching or—well, the fact is—I'm honest, if anything—Mr. Hoffman has again gone intrepidly into the tall sticks and found the crude makings of another great writer—maybe.

I'VE cooked over a camp-fire, and swapped yarns around that same camp-fire with loquacious adventurers whose travels covered strips of earth from the Yukon to Patagonia. I've thrown the squaw hitch on a pack. I have seen the diamond, both big and little, thrown by others, but never achieved it myself. I have struck a pay streak in a place closely resembling the one where "Peaceful" Dan Kirby found his high grade.

BUT my greatest adventure, of course, was my voluntary assumption of the bonds and responsibilities of matrimony which necessitates the forgoing of many more colorful lines of endeavor in favor of one, less interesting perhaps, but more sure of adequate remuneration.—EDISON FOWLER.

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J. D. NEWSOM tells us something about South Sea customs that figure in his story in this issue:

Troca shell is one of the most valuable articles of trade in Melanesia. When I was out there it fetched twenty-five dollars a ton in Sydney although it could be picked up for about fifteen dollars. Most of the so-called mother-of-pearl buttons, studs and so forth are really made out of troca, hence the demand.

THE custom of tapu is so widespread as to require very little mention, I suppose. Each island has its own variation of the term, but the custom is well-nigh universal and its enforcement is rigid.

In southern Melanesia the practice of tapu is closely connected with the secret societies and is used as a sort of "burglar insurance," but in a novel way. Each society has its own distinctive badge—a particular flower, a combination of leaves of different plants, etc.—and whatever this badge is placed upon becomes tapu, not to the members of the society, but to the other people of the tribe. The result is, of course, that the smaller the society the greater the protection it offers against theft.

THE origin of the secret societies—so-called for want of a more descriptive term—is ascribed to bands of immigrants who settled in the islands and excluded the aborigines from the rites associated with the cult of the dead. In the course of time as the immigrants intermarried with indigenous women their offspring were initiated into the mysteries of the lodge and, very gradually, the entire population was absorbed into its fold, until today there is no obvious distinction between immigrant and aborigine. Paradoxially, where the newcomers were numerous—as in the Solomons—the societies are practically non-existent; where they were few in numbers the societies still flourish; the probable answer being that where they were in a minority they were far more clannish and in modern parlance more "patriotic" in their zeal to uphold their special customs.

These migrants introduced among other things the idea that it was necessary to preserve the body after death to insure the safety of the soul, a highly developed stone culture, tattooing, sun-worship, and many other apparently unassociated practices. These features are found in close association in so many parts of the world that Elliot-Smith, Rivers, and Parry, to mention but a few names, were led to the conclusion that a body of mariners found their way about the earth at a very remote period and spread these customs wherever they went, much as the white man does today among people of ruder culture.

THERE seems to be little or no doubt that the culture-complex carried by these voyagers was that of the Nile Valley where most of the practices mentioned above originated. Mummification, for instance, as practised in Egypt in the XVIII Dynasty was also practised until a very short time ago by the natives of the Torres Islands, north of Cape York, Australia, where the climatic conditions are so wholly different as to preclude the idea that the Torres Islanders evolved such preservation of the dead without outside influence.

The movement is too vast to be dealt with here at any great length. It started somewhere around 2,000 B. C. from the Red Sea ports and the Persian Gulf. In its inception it was not a migration but a search for gold and pearls and precious stones for the Lords of the Middle Kingdom. How these adventurers reached South America, how they spread up around the coasts of Europe is a story which has still to be fully written, but of these wanderings there can be no doubt. There monuments stand to this day stretching from Karnak in Egypt, eastward more than half way around the world to Peru, and in many places, among the Khasi tribes of Assam, for instance, they still build mortuary chambers closely following the pattern of the Egyptian *mastaba*. In the Solomons, where they have no means of quarrying the necessary blocks of stone, miniature dolmens are made into which the soul of the dead is supposed to go.

THE evidence is fairly conclusive, but is too voluminous to be dealt with here. Elliot Smith in "The Migrations of Early Culture" (Manchester Univ. Press) has sketched the movement showing the distribution of the so-called megalithic migrants, while W. H. R. Rivers in the "History of the Melanesian Society" (Cambridge Univ. Press) has dealt with the theoretical side of the question.—J. D. NEWSOM.

IF YOU would like to have the original painting of a cover that may have pleased you we should be glad to have you bid upon it. No bid of less than ten dollars per cover considered. Send in your bid any time. Covers will be sent express collect to highest bidders about July first.

A LETTER from our old comrade Captain L. H. North, who was with California Joe a few minutes before the latter was killed:

Columbus, Nebraska.

I saw sometime ago in *Adventure* that Mr. Huston was in Washington, D. C. I was in hopes that on his return he would come this way and stop over with me for a while. The old-timers are getting pretty scarce and I do like to meet any of them that I ever knew. Of all the officers of the Battalion of Pawnee Scouts, I am the only one left alive.

I AM always very much interested in Hugh Pendexter's letters to Camp-Fire. In the February 3rd, 1921, number he has something to say about California Joe and also about Col. Cody meeting him in 1864. This is no doubt a mistake as Col. Cody told me that he never saw California Joe till 1876. He—Joe—led a company of gold-seekers into the Black Hills in the Fall of 1875 or the Spring of 1876. He was in the Hills when Wild Bill was killed and in October of 1876 started for Sidney, Nebraska and got to Ft. Robinson the same day that my brother—Major F. North—and myself with the Pawnee Scouts and General McKenzie with the Fourth Cavalry brought Red Cloud and his band from Chadron Creek. Joe camped on the Creek about a mile from us and came over to see my

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brother. They had met the year before at Ft. Laramie. He had supper with us and went back to his camp. Just after he left, we got orders to take the horses that we had taken from Red Cloud to Ft. Laramie and turn them over to the Quartermaster there. We had been in the saddle for twenty-four hours with two hours' rest, but my brother took foot of one company and started at once for Laramie. It was ninety miles and he made it by nine o'clock the next morning and turned over the horses, 722 head, to the Q. M.

I WAS to follow with the wagons the next day. In the morning "California Joe" walked down to our camp just as I was ready to start. I talked with him a few minutes, bade him good-by and took the road for Laramie. Before Joe got back to his camp some one rode up behind him and shot him in the back, killing him instantly. I don't think it was ever known who did it but it was believed that it was the same gang that killed "Wild Bill" or had him killed. As far as I know I was the last man who ever talked to him. I should think he was at least fifty years old and must have been well over six feet high. My brother was six feet and one inch and Joe was taller than he. He was dark and wore whiskers all over his face and rather long hair. Both hair and whiskers were quite gray. He was slow of speech and rather slow-motioned. This was the only time I ever saw him and I never heard what his name was.

I see so many things in *Adventure* that I know something about that I want to write about every number I get.—L. H. NORTH.

CAPTAIN NORTH'S letter was sent to Hugh Pendexter and here is H. P.'s reply written back in 1921:

Norway, Maine.

The North letter is bully. I herewith return it. It demonstrates once more that *Adventure's* Camp-Fire is doing a service for Americana that no other periodicals have done or can do: the clearing up certain frontier bits of history which have remained uncertainties, or enigmas, for all these many years. In the "Great Salt Lake Trail," by Col. Henty Inman and Col. Wm. F. Cody, page 472, Col. Cody is quoted as saying (four pages of it and I give but a little of the first for sake of dates):

"In 1864 two military expeditions were sent into the northwest country to disperse any hostile gatherings of Indians, one expedition starting from Fort Lincoln on the Missouri River under command of General George A. Custer. It was on this expedition that Custer discovered gold in the Black Hills, a discovery which ultimately led up to the Great Sioux War of 1876, when he lost his life on the Little Big Horn. The other expedition started from Rawlins on the Union Pacific Railway to go north into the Big Horn basin in the Big Horn Mountain country. This expedition was commanded by Colonel Anson Mills. I was chief scout and guide of the expedition.

One day when we were on the Great Divide of the Big Horn Mountains, the command stopped to let the pack-train come up. While we were resting there, quite a number of officers and myself were talking to Colonel Mills, when we noticed, coming from the direction in which we were going, a solitary horseman about three miles distant. He was coming from the ridge of the mountains. He kept drawing nearer and nearer to us, until we made out it was a white man, and as he came on I recognized him to be California Joe. When he got within hailing distance I sung out, 'Hello, Joe,' and he answered, 'Hello, Bill.'"

There follows more conversation and recital of a joke Joe played on the soldiers' packers, etc. Buffalo Bill has Joe, in answer to Col. Mills's question, point to his meager outfit and declare it to be the total result of "*seventy* years' gathering.'"

THE date of 1864 probably is a typographical error for 1874, for it was in that year the Government sent Custer with a staff of geologists, practical miners, botanists, etc., into the hills to look for gold. But even so, the quoted statement above and all that follows in the book is wrong, or else Col. Cody erred in recollection in stating he did not see Joe till 1876. But the vital point, as brought out by the North letter, is the time of Joe's death and the locale. In March, 1874, he wrote to Custer from California. As I have already stated, he was with the Jenney expedition to the hills in 1875 (see report dated April 15, 1876) and now North definitely shows he was murdered on Chadron Creek.

IN MY story, now being written, Wild Bill is killed off stage, the day before the action of the story begins. In the accompanying dope I'll show that contemporaries charge that McCall was hired by the gambling ring to commit the crime. Leander P. Richardson, who wrote much of the West and who was in the hills and met Bill two days before he was killed, declares that McCall confessed on his trial at Yankton that he was hired to commit the murder. This would mean the "gang" referred to by North. When the North letter is published I shall clip and preserve it. In writing Mr. North make him my compliments.

Undoubtedly he knew Captain John Bourke, who was with Crook at the time Custer was killed, also when Red Cloud refused to come into the agency and moved his village to Chadron Creek, 22 miles from the agency, where he was surrounded and brought in, together with his "705 ponies and 50 rifles." Dr. Yarrow, Bourke's intimate friend, corresponds regularly with me. If Uncle Frank is right Joe's name was "Huston." Why not ask Mr. North if he knew his name? There still remains much discrepancy in the estimates of Joe's age. Inman and Cody have him 70 years old in "1864" (which should, doubtless, read 1874). North has him 50 in 1876. Custer has him in 1868 "about forty-five years old, perhaps older." He and North are closer together than Inman and Cody. Thanks for seeing the letter and overlook my spilling so many words concerning it. But I was tickled. Bourke, in his "On the Border With Crook," fails to mention Joe's death, although he speaks of several lesser lights—PENDEXTER.

Here is Capt. North's reply:

Columbus, Nebraska.

In regard to California Joe I know absolutely nothing about his name or age and never saw him but the one time that I mentioned. In 1875 my brother, Major Frank North, was chief scout and

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guide at Fort D. A. Russel, Cheyenne, Wyoming. While in service at Fort Laramie that year he met Joe, who was camped above the Fort on the North Platte River. He, Joe, was acting as guide for a lot of gold-seekers on their way to the Black Hills. His party was stopped by the Government troops until a treaty could be made with Red Cloud and Spotted Tail opening the Hills for settlement. My brother rode over from Port Laramie to Joe's camp every day for perhaps a month and became very well acquainted with him but I don't think he ever knew his name, as to his age I was guessing at that.

I am very much interested in Hugh Pendexter's stories, especially where the Pawnees figure in them. My company of scouts was recruited from the Skidi Band. I wonder if Mr. Pendexter knows that the Arickrees were an offshoot of the Skidi. They separated perhaps 140 years ago and the site of the old village where the separation took place is about fifty miles west of here on the Loup River. I found the ridges of dirt where their houses were in the fall of 1872 and where I came down to the village at Genga (where the Pawnees were then located). I stopped in the Skidi village and was told the story of the separation of the band. I had never been there since till last Summer—forty-eight years—but found the spot without much difficulty. It was in a cornfield, but we found a few pieces of broken pottery.

Will you forgive a garrulous old man? When I get started on the Skidis I never know when to stop.—L. H. North.

KEEPERS of Camp-Fire Stations are under no obligations whatever to answer letters concerning their districts. By this time any reader ought to know enough to turn to our "Ask Adventure" experts for information on the localities they cover. It costs the inquirer nothing and that is what our "A. A." men are here for. My suggestion to Keepers of Stations is that when they get a letter of inquiry the waste-basket can take it with very little effort on their part. Of course, if they *want* to answer, that's their own personal business, but there is certainly nothing in a Keeper's duty that requires any other reply than the waste-basket.

To save this particular Keeper even a waste-basket effort in future, and because the advice he gives is so sound and unbiased, here is something from A. C. Smith, Keeper of Station 87 at Miami, Florida:

Miami, Florida.

There's just one thing that can not be given too much stress to the man who wants to find pastures new, in which he can make a living. That is, no man can expect to make any considerable amount of money unless he has the capital to make an initial investment. Many of my inquiries are from people in the North and East, owners of small homes or farms, who want to come to Miami and adjacent territory to live. My advice to these people is, when the circumstances warrant it, come down and see the country. Spend one season down here, see how you like it and if you would be content to remain here. *But don't sell your present holding until you have seen what we have here.* It is foolish for a man who has never had any experience in raising citrus fruits to expect to come to Florida and make a killing in a single season; it takes work and knowledge of the game to produce results and it also takes capital to start. Other lines of endeavor are the same way.—A. C. Smith.

OUR Camp-Fire stations are spreading over the map. Help make them grow.

A STATION may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station shall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and preserve the register book.

No responsibility for mail is assumed by anybody; the Station merely uses ordinary care. Entries in register to be confined to name or serial number, route, destination, permanent address and such other brief notes or remarks as desired; each Station can impose its own limit on space to be used. Registers become permanent property of Station; signs remain property of this magazine, so that if there is due cause of complaint from members a Station can be discontinued by withdrawing sign.

A Station bulletin board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to conditions of trails, etc., resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer, calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or tips about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin-board.

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above Station privileges subject to the Keeper's discretion. Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

Keepers answer letters only if they wish. For local information write "Ask Adventure."

A Station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its possibilities as headquarters for a local club of resident Camp-Fire members are excellent.

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ASIA—OVERMASTERING GIANT

by William Ashley Anderson

A VAST "corridor" stretches west to east through Asia.

Starting from a labyrinth of mountains in Armenia, the chief of which is Ararat (17,000 ft.), the walls gradually diverge. The northern wall, formed mainly by the Altai Mountains, with parallel ranges supporting them, extends beyond Mongolia and into eastern Siberia; while the southern wall, after encircling Persia, becomes the loftiest and most imposing barrier on earth—the unconquered Himalayas. This range, after describing the boundary of Tibet and India, sweeps in a great curve southward and falls into the sea, though it may still be traced in the islands of Andaman, Nicobar, Sumatra, and on into the East Indies.

Across this corridor, on the eastern borders of Afghanistan, stretches a short connecting range of mountains, the Pamirs, forming a sort of bulkhead between the eastern and western sections of the corridor.

This bulkhead is appropriately called "the roof of the world," and is in fact the most significant feature on the face of the earth for having shaped the history of mankind.

All evidence indicates that man originated somewhere in this vicinity. The bone-gatherers are now convinced that not only man but almost all animal life, of the larger species, first appeared here and thence became distributed in all directions. It is, then, the place of the beginning of the greatest of all adventures—the adventure of man!

Nevertheless, in the rich annals of adventure the names of few Europeans or Americans are linked with individual achievement in Asia. Down through all the ages only a handful have won distinction there—a few such as Alexander the Great, Xenophon, Richard of England, St. Louis, Marco Polo, some of the earlier monks and Jesuits, Clive, Peary, Abbé Huc, General Gordon, Kaufman. Other names, of course, come to mind, but they are prominent to us only and have left little impress on the Orient. The greatest adventurers were the unknown artisans who at the time of the Crusades, and later, penetrated even into China in search of masterpieces and upon whose discoveries many of the revolutionary inventions of the Renaissance depended.

The fact is that Asia is so vast, so varied, so thoroughly charged with the little-known impulses that set great aggregations of human beings in motion, that an inconspicuous foreigner has little chance for individual distinction. It takes an oriental despot with a simitar stained with blood to write a name across Asia.

Great leaders there marched at the head, not of armies, but of races, founding, not mere families, but nations of their own kith and kin.

The Gobi Desert could be lifted from this continent and placed as a blanket over half of the United States; the Siberian plain could smother all Europe; the Arabian Desert could blot out the remaining States of America and most of Alaska; and, after all this was accomplished, nine hundred million Asiatics would still be leading productive lives in undisturbed countries. For every city of a hundred thousand in America the Asiatics could still erect a city of almost a million.

Asia covers one-third the land surface of the globe, with a coast-line more than nine thousand miles greater than the entire circumference of the earth. The continent stretches from the equator to the north pole; from the narrow Bering Strait that separates it from North America to the Suez Canal, the little ditch that cuts it off from Africa.

It embraces the most desolate and uninhabitable areas of the earth; at the same time it sustains the densest populations. Its face is scarred by the deepest depressions yet measured by man; while, on the other hand, its tremendous, unconquered, mist-shrouded mountains far overtop those of all other continents. It experiences the highest known temperatures, and also the coldest known to man—temperatures far colder than the polar regions.

Not a Soul in 3,500 Miles

ACROSS its deserts it is possible to go distances greater than from New York to San Francisco without encountering a human being; yet at the same time a man can be more quickly lost in the mazes of its

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cities than in the great metropolises of Europe. Every known race is represented upon this continent, and the beginnings of its civilizations extend deep into ungaged antiquity. The most domesticated of all animals, the camel, was tamed here at a period so remote that an unquestionable living specimen of wild camel has never been found. Nevertheless the most savage of predatory beasts, the rarest wild animals, the strangest reptiles, and the most brilliant birds are today still found in its jungles, mountains, forests and swamps.

Asia, therefore, offers everything to the adventurer.

To understand something of the great diversity of creatures there, to realize some of the reasons why its separate civilizations afford such sharp contrasts to one another, to comprehend why vast, desert, uninhabitable tracts run side by side with fertile, densely populated countries, it is absolutely necessary to have a clear knowledge of the topography of the continent and its effect upon the movements of the human races.

Asia can be roughly laid into an oblong, with a block taken out of the northwest to represent Russia; while three great peninsulas (Indo-China and Malaysia; India; Arabia) extend below the lower line; and the eastern side, drawn out distortedly to the northeastward, is made rough and irregular by islands and peninsulas (Kamchatka, Sakhalien, Japan, Korea, Formosa, etc.).

The chief distinguishing feature of the continent as a whole is the corridor and the plateaux about it, and the bulkhead of the Pamirs. Man seems first to have appeared here, already divided into three races: The Caucasian, or white; the Mongolian, or yellow; the Negro, or black.

There is little local evidence of the black people, but it is likely they were the first to move. They are scattered south and westward, along the equatorial regions from Borneo into Africa.

The whites, who appeared on the western slopes of the Pamirs, followed the corridor westward, passing over the mountain walls, north and south, and taking in time the characteristics of the Hindus, the Semites (principally the Jews and Arabs), and the Caucasians, who continued on into Europe.

The yellow people passed down the eastern slope into the broadening corridor which terminates in a series of mountain faults or steps leading gradually down to the Pacific Ocean, forming the Chinese nation. Except for the Mongolian Tatars, the yellow people in Asia are represented by the Chinese, the Japanese and the Malays (a divergent type).

Three-fourths of the population of Asia are Mongolian; one-fourth Caucasian; the Negritos and other black East Indians forming so small a percentage of the whole that they are not comparable, while in remote parts there are remnants of people whose history has not yet been traced—the Veddahs of Ceylon, for instance, and the hairy Ainus of northern Japan.

How the Desert Made History

The general exodus of these great races from central Asia seems to have been impelled by a continuous drying-up of this whole inland section, a process of dehydration which is still continuing and over which man has no control.

As central Asia became desert, tribes of both great races crossed the confining mountains and began the broader movements which mark the later history of Asia.

The yellow races found fertile lands to the east, and early developed civilized communities. The white races lunged in several directions, some branches early establishing highly civilized nations, while others, passing into the forests of Europe, continued almost as savages until comparatively recent times; just as branches of the Mongolian race, crossing to the American continent, became savages there.

The yellow and white races in Asia first encountered along the mountain slopes.

In the south the sallow-complexioned whites pushed forward as far as Siam, where the wonderful ruins of Angkor, deep in the jungle, mark the eastern limits of the greatest white empire of the south.

In the north the yellow people swept over the mountains and out upon the plains, driving the white race westward before them even as far as the Danube River and the borders of Austria. Though these invaders formed merely the spearheads of greater movements in the heart of Asia, yet they left permanent remains in Europe where their descendants maintain distinct nations to this day—the Finns and Lapps in the north, and the Magyars of Hungary and the Turks in the south.

Keeping in mind the corridor, there are

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then three great geological divisions in Asia: (1) The featureless Siberian plains and the uplands of Mongolia; (2) the band of great mountain ranges which form the corridor, with shorter parallel ranges supporting them, and the China faults running north and south between them; and (3) the broad, flat, southern peninsulas.

Three river systems, including some of the greatest rivers of the world—theYang-tse-kiang, Hwang-ho, Brahmaputra, Yenesei, Amur, Ganges, Indus, Tigris and Euphrates—drain the continent. There are also a number of large lakes, including the Caspian Sea and the Aral. The Dead Sea in Palestine is a continuation of the great rift which splits Africa from end to end. Almost all the vast desert areas were once inundated, and in fact all the corridor from east to west of Asia, including the tremendous walls of mountains on both sides, were the most recent parts of the continent to emerge from the sea.

The three river systems correspond to the geological divisions—those rivers rising in the Mongolian tablelands and flowing in a northerly or northeasterly direction across Siberia; the inland drainage system of short shallow streams and salt lakes, most of which are growing noticeably dryer each year; and the Thibetan system, comprising the numerous and generally well-known rivers that flow east, south, and west.

80 Degrees F. Below at Verhoyansk

The key to the climate of Asia lies in the great desert region in the heart of the continent.

In Summer a column of superheated air is constantly ascending above this desert area. Seasons of continuous heat greater than 100 degrees F. are not uncommon, and the highest known temperatures have been recorded here.

This ascending column of air, like the equatorial doldrums, causes an inrush of air currents from all directions.

The northern limits of Siberia—where the Winter cold is so intense that the ground is perpetually frozen to a depth of three hundred feet, the lowest known temperature (80 degrees F.) having been recorded at Verhoyansk at the mouth of the river Lena—are affected at one extremity of the continent; while the great humid peninsulas of the south are strongly affected at the other.

The Indo-Chinese and Indian peninsulas, being almost girded by oceans, experience periodic winds saturated with moisture during the Summer. These are the winds known as the monsoons. China and the islands of the Far East experience similar winds, though more likely to be affected by local conditions.

In Winter central Asia is intensely cold, and the flow of air currents is then generally reversed, sweeping toward the sea. The seasons of changing winds, Spring and Autumn, give rise to the violent cyclones and typhoons characteristic of the Indian Ocean and the China Sea.

Excluding the Mediterranean area, which has a climate similar to Europe, and the various islands along the coast, which are subject to special conditions, the continent divides itself roughly into five regions affected by climate in different ways.

The monsoon regions, the most populous habitat of man, embrace practically all the countries which are most familiar to us, and which therefore have given rise to a one-sided impression of Asia.

These countries—India, Burma, the Indo-Chinese peninsula, and China proper—are bounded on the inland side by mountains against which the moisture of the inward-flowing currents of air of Summer are condensed and precipitated in the form of rain and snow. From these reservoirs flow the great rivers that water the broad loess plains. The monsoon period is one of gray weeping skies and frequent violent downpours.

The heaviest rainfall in the world occurs at Cherrapunji, in the Patkoi Hills, where, between April and September, four hundred inches of rain fall, which seems unbelievable when compared to the sixty inches annual rainfall of Alabama, the highest in America.

The greatest of the monsoon countries are India, China, Burma and Indo-China.

These last two are border countries and have taken so much from the greater civilizations to the north and west of them that they have become a sort of blending of both; but, like human half-breeds, both countries lack the distinctive dominant characteristics that distinguish the great parent countries.

Soil a Thousand Feet Thick

China and India, though differing in almost all respects, have two elemental characteristic in common. Both are affected

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by the monsoons, upon which they depend, and both embrace great areas of loess formation—that is, rich soil which has silted down from the mountains to a depth in places of one thousand feet without a sign of rock. These rich plains, bordering broad rivers, sustain enormous populations, the industry of centuries having greatly increased their fertility.

India, being less compact than China, since a mixture of races and nations has caused much confusion among the political divisions, offers surprizing contrasts in its people, its cities, and its kinds of civilization. The Taj Mahal and the Fort, at Agra, for example, two of the most exquisite bits of architecture in the world—designed, by the way, by an Italian, one of the little-known adventurers already referred to—are within sight of the hutches of almost naked peasants.

The bulk of the population of India are farmers, and in proportion to the large population there are few cities; yet the country is lined with railroads, and there is a fair automobile route from the Indian Ocean to the Bay of Bengal, while the Grand Trunk Road runs from Calcutta clear across the empire to Peshawur at the mouth of the Khyber Pass leading into Afghanistan.

Calcutta and Bombay are both great cities, modern in almost all respects—with imposing railroad terminals, docks, markets, hotels, clubs, universities, publishing houses, factories, apartment houses, theaters, restaurants—and are comparable to such cities as Baltimore and New Orleans.

The country districts, however, are primitive, and the jungles and forests utterly wild.

Along the borders there are often outbreaks, and riots sometimes within, but the national unrest featured in newspapers has no more significance than the labor troubles of European countries. There is more in common between Mohammedan Indians and British Christians than between the same Mohammedans and their Brahman campatriots.

As a whole the people are religious and mentally active but physically indolent. Lacking fuel and sufficient minerals, India probably can never be a manufacturing country. Labor is cheap and competition keen, so there are few places for Europeans except in the professions, administrative positions and commerce.

China is distinctly different from any other country in the world. It is the only living nation whose clear unbroken recorded history goes back beyond the ancients and whose civilization is similar in its forms today to what it was then. When the great-great-great-grandfather of Socrates, the father of our philosophy, was perhaps a baby in a rough cottage on some Grecian hillside, Confucius, whose teaching set in fixed molds the civilization of the Chinese people even as it is today, was telling his pupils—

"I am merely a transmitter (of knowledge), fond of antiquity, and earnest in seeking it there."

This man was teaching as long before Christ as the later crusades are before our own time. And he is so real an identity that an exact census may be taken of his living descendants, all of whom until recently were entitled to special privileges in the civil-service examinations of China.

The people of China have time after time been afflicted by the greatest calamities that have ever visited human beings; calamities due to every cause—flood, drought, famine, pestilence, war.

The Conquerable, but Indomitable, Chinese

The Chinese have been conquered several times by barbarians overrunning the borders of the empire, yet each time the conquerors have eventually become absorbed by the conquered, taking on their characteristics so completely that in the end it was impossible to distinguish one from the other. China, as a means of defense, built up a system of buffer states to guard against such incursions—Thibet, Turkestan, Mongolia, Manchuria, Korea. The Great Wall, extending about fifteen hundred miles across the northern frontier—the only work of man, by the way, which is presumed to be visible from Mars—with watch towers and garrison posts within sight of one another, was built hundreds of years before Christ as additional defense against the mounted hordes of barbarians who lived where now is a vast, sparsely inhabited steppe. At another time all cities along the seaboard were withdrawn to a distance of about ten miles inland to frustrate piratical raids. Every city of first importance in China, with few exceptions, is even now surrounded by a wall of its own; and until the revolution

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of 1911 which made the empire a nominal republic all gates were closed at sundown.

The experiences of China have all been of the most tremendous character, even those of modern times being of such proportions as to astound us.

In 1851-4 the Yellow River changed its course so that its new mouth was as far away from its old one as almost the full distance across New York State. Fifty thousand square miles were affected and a million people wiped out; yet by massed human labor the old dikes were mended and another flood averted.

At the same time the Taiping insurrection was in progress—a war started by a lone outlawed bandit who set himself up as the Messiah (in order to have a slogan!). In the course of this insurrection great fertile plains were laid waste, hundreds of towns and villages were razed, and well over fifteen million inhabitants perished—a total probably greater than the combined losses from all causes of the nations involved in the late World War; yet within a few years almost all evidence of devastation was gone, and the life of the country went on much the same as ever. Not many years later came the Mohammedan rebellion in western China—a war waged apparently to decide how a beard should be worn—in which a couple of million more are said to have been killed.

The Chinese are without doubt the most industrious people in the world. Americans find them very human and understandable. They are cheerful, good-natured, honest—yet they are terrific gamblers—open-handed, democratic, and game. They are remarkably adaptable, and though unobtrusive are probably to be found in more parts of the world today than the people of any other nation.

There is a vast difference in types in China proper—and a variety of dialects. The northerners are usually large men, stolid, materialistic, conservative, most of them being farmers. The southerners, on the other hand, are small, alert, luxurious, impulsive—and these are the ones Europeans most often come in contact with, since they are to a large extent seafaring people, and great travelers.

Europeans in China are in theory confined to several specified sea-ports and river-ports, called "Treaty Ports," where they are supposed to live and trade. These ports, among which are Shanghai, Hankow, Canton, Tientsin, have large European settlements developed in the most modern style, the native city adjoining usually adopting many of the improvements.

World's Most Cosmopolitan City

Shanghai, the most important Treaty Port, is a highly modern city in every respect, and more cosmopolitan perhaps than any other city in the world—with numerous hotels, palm gardens, theaters, cathedrals, department stores, shops with the latest Parisian styles, florists, colleges, universities, observatories, factories, banks, clubs, cabarets. When I was last there it claimed the largest bar in the world, and the distinction of consuming more champagne *per capita* than any other city.

Despite the supposed limitation to trade only in the Treaty Ports, however, foreigners move freely about the country, subject only to the dangers Chinese themselves might encounter; and these are always localized. There is good train and river-boat service to nearly all important parts, and hotel accommodation in all the better-known cities.

There are four ports which were established and developed by foreigners as foreign territory—Hong Kong and Wei-hai-wei (British), Tsing-tao (German, now Japanese) and Macao (Portuguese).

China is distinctly a land of romance and adventure. All the mystery and charm of an ancient but still living and extremely vital people is to be found in its cities; while the border countries offer all the rough contacts of frontier life among barbaric people and in wild rugged country. Harbin, in Manchuria, and Kalgan at the mouth of the pass that leads from China through the mountains on to the Mongolian plateau, are two of the most fascinating frontier towns in the world.

There are certain familiar aspects of China that appeal to Americans. Geographically it is very similar to America. The forests of Manchuria and Shensi are remarkably like those of the United States and Canada, with maple, pine, oak, chestnut, birch and willow as the more common trees; with glades carpeted with daisies, buttercups, violets and other familiar wildflowers; while the cultivated flowers are most often asters, chrysanthemums, narcissi and lilies. Large, fine watermelons, sweet

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potatoes, peanuts, tobacco and cotton are common crops.

There is plenty of room in China for Americans who have something to teach or something new or useful to sell. But no American can succeed who thinks he knows more than a Chinese about the general principles of business. Success depends on learning their needs from the Chinese direct, and then cooperating with them.

These two great countries then—China and India—with Indo-China and Siam, and Japan (a highly specialized and now industrial nation, the character of which is sufficiently well known), form the monsoon area—the area in which the vast bulk of the inhabitants of Asia live.

The remainder, and by far the greatest portion of the continent, is mostly rugged, barren, but wildly picturesque and full of adventurous possibilities.

The hot deserts of the southwest are a continuation of the Sahara region of Africa, cut off from the monsoon influence. Lacking rain, the chief source of water is in the wells, and the chief food comes from the date-palms that surround them.

Parallels of America in Indian Days

The great high plateaux in central Asia, swept by piercingly cold winds in Winter, and still cool in Summer because of the elevation, are sparsely inhabited, and government is usually administered at a distance. The few inhabitants are rough and uncertain in character.

Some of the valleys of the mountainous sections are indifferently cultivated; while the chief reliance for subsistence upon the plains is placed upon flocks of sheep and cattle. The mountains, however, are rich in minerals of all sorts; while the plains are like our old untouched prairies, the nomadic Mongols closely resembling American plains Indians, and the antelope, even, resembling the pronghorn, while the great *argali* in the mountains along the plains is a large cousin of the Rocky Mountain bighorn.

The forest region, lying in a band north of the deserts and plateaux, presents some remarkable features. The southern fringe of this region is crossed by the Trans-Siberian Railroad. The country is mostly flat and featureless and cool; but the Summer days are long; and since there is little radiation the surface is quickly softened and kept moist from the constantly thawing subterranean frost. Wheat-raising and dairying are the principal occupations, and the forests are vast. The great Siberian forest is of such enormous proportions that even hunters have not yet penetrated beyond its fringes, and it is the natural habitat of a great range of animals from giant cousins of the Kadiak bear and the gray timber wolf to the great Manchurian tiger, the largest member of the cat family still in existence.

There is one more notable zone north of the forests—the region of frozen tundra through which the great rivers of the north pour their sluggish streams into the Arctic Sea. It is a region of great silence, cold, dark and dead in Winter; and in Summer with a low sun that thaws the tundra and creates vast, impassable swamps, covered with moss, lichen and shrub. But man has even found riches here; and one of the most important products of the country is—ivory! Mining is carried on to unearth large deposits of the almost perfect remains of mammoths whose tusks are sold in the ivory market.

This is characteristic of Asia—vast solitudes, and in the solitudes something of tremendous wealth and interest.

There is in Asia everything to arouse the interest of man—great wars to let the blood of fat nations, great conflicts with the tremendous forces of nature, great fields for commerce, great races vigorously engaged in all the activities known to man, evidences of rare and unseen game, and the greatest trophies that may fall to the rifle of the most daring hunters.

Unscalable mountains heave their tremendous shoulders up against the stars. There are countrysides, cut and measured to a grass-blade's width, crawling with industrious humanity. There are wind-swept plains with hardly a sign of life except a flying cloud of antelope or the smoking *yurta* (tent) of a nomad. There are hot, dank jungles where the black leopard and the rhinoceros drink from pools shadowed by orchid-dotted curtains. There are forests, cold and dark and terrible, whose game-trails no man has yet followed to an end. And there is the desert—blazing, alluring, and incomprehensible.

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HOWARD SHANNON, care Howard Shannon Co., 310 International Bldg., Washington, D. C. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

55. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Marshes and Swamplands of the Atlantic Coast from Philadelphia to Jacksonville
HOWARD SHANNON, care Howard Shannon Company, 310 International Bldg., Washington, D. C. Okefinokee and Dismal, Okranoke and the Marshes of Glynn; Croatan Indians of the Carolinas. History, traditions, customs, hunting, modes of travel, snakes.

56. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Orlando, Fla. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

57. Eastern U. S. Part 5 Maine
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

A.—Radio

DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J. Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

B.—Mining and Prospecting

VICTOR SHAW, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 745 Riverside Drive, New York City. A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads —songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.

D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

1.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), Editor *National Sportsman*, 275 Newbury Street, Boston, Mass.

2.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800, Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley,"), Editor *National Sportsman*, 275 Newbury St., Boston, Mass. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

F.—Tropical Forestry

DR. H. N. WHITFORD, School of Forestry, Yale University, New Haven, Conn. Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

G.—Aviation

MAJOR W. G. SCHAUFFLER, JR., National Aeronautic Association, 26 Jackson Place, Washington, D. C. Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

H.—STANDING INFORMATION

For **Camp-Fire Stations** write J. Cox, care *Adventure*.

For general information on **U. S.** and its **possessions,** write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash, D. C., for catalog of all Government publications. For **U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries,** the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

For the **Philippines, Porto Rico,** and customs receiverships in **Santa Domingo** and **Haiti,** the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash, D. C.

For **Alaska,** the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For **Hawaii,** Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For **Cuba,** Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union for general information on **Latin-American matters** or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For **R. C. M. P.,** Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For **Canal Zone,** the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

National **Rifle** Association of America, Brig. Gen. Fred H. Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States **Revolver** Ass'n. W. A. MORRALL, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

National parks, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Washington, D. C.

Travel in Arabia

A FEW tips on equipment, climate, and nerve:

Question:—"The writer, together with a pal, anticipate a sojourn in Arabia and Persia, Alexandria, Egypt; and in the hope that we will not be forced to depart for these parts without some knowledge of what we are doing and how—but not why—I address this letter to you per instructions set forth in *Adventure*, trusting that you will ease me some information. My questions are as follows:

When is the "rainy season?'

What equipment to go into the interior purposely to take in the sights?

What approximate cost for this equipment?

Would it be cheaper to purchase this equipment in this country or there?

What would expenses run approximately if necessary to stay in hotels or inns part of the time, not including victuals?

Are there many Americans in this territory, or is the white race mostly British?

Would you surmise that it would be at all possible to get a position of any kind if funds ran out?

I have asked possibly more than my share of questions but will certainly appreciate your answers as well as any general information you may see fit to furnish, that might be helpful in overcoming my gross dumbness on living conditions, travel requirements, etc., in those countries.

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An envelop and sufficient postage are enclosed. Let me thank you in advance for your kind cooperation."—GEORGE S. WALTER, III, Chicago, Ill.

Answer, by Capt. Giddings:—Probably the best season to visit Arabia is that which lies between November and March, though in the interior of the country the heat seems equally intense the year around. Don't worry about rain; you won't be bothered half enough.

I'm afraid you have a wrong idea of the interior of Arabia. There are no hotels as you know them—the *fonduks* or inns are not overclean, nor have they the facilities you are used to. One drives his camel into a sun-baked courtyard and hunts out a soft spot to sleep. Maybe you can get food—and maybe you can't.

By way of equipment, Abercrombie & Fitch, New York, supply an exceptional grade of tropical clothing. There is no big-game hunting to amount to anything in Arabia, and a heavy-calibered rifle is totally unneccessary. Take a Colt's .45; single-action frontier model preferred. It is much less liable to get out of order than an automatic. I carried a Luger in Arabia. If you feel that you would like to take along a rifle, then take the lightest and handiest of them all—a Savage featherweight, .30-30 caliber (because you can get .30-30s anywhere in the world.)

Can't give you any idea as to the cost of your proposed trip. Depends largely upon your nerve. And if you don't possess this valuable asset—I mean nerve—keep out of interior Arabia.

There are a few Americans scattered about; I met three in Muscat. Mostly Britishers in that country though. Fine fellows, too, in the majority of cases. By the way, the Jebel Akhdar (Green Mountains) are split just below Muscat—near Sur, I think—and you can get into the interior through this pass.

You wouldn't accept nor could you handle, the usual run of jobs in Arabia.

Here is a rule for all adventurers in half-wild or wild countries, and I know whereof I speak: Do not depend on getting jobs if you run out of funds or trade-goods. If diplomacy fails you, have the nerve to demand food, shelter and clothing—and have the courage to back up your demand. Adventuring is a two-fisted game, and not to be indulged in by weaklings.

Best wishes to you, and all success.

The full statement of the sections, as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

To the Andes by Sea and Land

HERE'S a wonder trip:

Question:—"I have read so many of your stories and articles in *Adventure* that I have the feeling of addressing an old acquaintance. Now I come to claim a personal share of your experience.

Stationed here on the Zone for a three-year tour, I am planning to utilize a forthcoming period of leave for a brief glimpse of South America. I will state my interests as briefly as I can and then put my query in the form of direct questions.

I expect to have about three months of time. My funds will be strictly limited as well. Say not to exceed $500 for the actual journey, not including preliminary equipment. I want to see as many aspects of life in South America as I can within the limits mentioned, emphasis on nature and native life away from the main thoroughfares rather than the centers of civilization. In other words I want to see the Andes, tropical rivers, virgin forests, bird and animal life typical of the continent and if possible primitive peoples at home.

A large order you say for three months and $500. I know it. If I can't get a whole loaf I'll take a half. I'm asking your advice as to how to get the *most* for my money and time.

I have two possible trips in mind. The first, described in a recent number of *National Geographic* is Panama to Buenaventura, Cali, Bogota and down the Magdalena River. The second is, I think, one of your own suggestions to another inquirer in *Adventure* some time back—Panama to Guayaquil, Quito, Canelos, overland to Iquitos and down the Amazon.

Now for the questions. Is either of these trips practicable within the time and expense I have named? Would either of them be worth while from the standpoint I have set forth? Can you suggest anything better? I assure you that any advice or information you may feel like volunteering will be most gratefully received.

I want to thank both you and *Adventure* for any attention you may find it possible to give this letter.

Please withhold my name should any part of this query be printed."— —— ——, Camp Gaillard, C. Z.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—I sure appreciated the friendly spirit of your letter. I used to work there on the C. Z. every time I passed through, and even now a C. Z. stamp on a letter makes me homesick.

I would suggest the following trip, after giving due thought to what you say and the time you have at your disposal. For what you want to do, Ecuador would suit you better than Colombia. There is more of the real thing there. Now as to details: The Panama R. R. runs a boat to Guayaquil and the P. S. N. C. runs a through boat and a coaster which makes the stops. The through boats take three days and the coaster about six to seven.

If you can't get a half-rate I would suggest taking the coast boat, deck passage, with a hammock and slip some one about three dollars to allow you to swing your hammock somewhere on the poop where you can loll and read between ports and go ashore when they make the stops, which is usually each morning. This will give you a look-in at all the main Colombian west-coast ports and the Panama-hat ports of Ecuador which I found very interesting.

Just before you enter the Guayas River for the trip up to Guayaquil and some fifty miles out to sea you will begin to see sea snakes and sea-turtles floating on the water. Be sure to have a camera and take a picture of them, for if you ever tell it you will be branded as an artist with the long bow. I never saw quite so many snakes in my life, and I'll venture to say that I shot a hundred of them. They are sea-snakes and home on some of the islands near the mouth of the river I was told. Some of the turtles are of immense size.

Another thing of interest on the way to Guayaquil

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are the dolphins who get about six inches ahead of the prow of the ship and pilot it along.

In the towns are numerous things that a man will regret not having photographed, such as making Panama hats, unloading cattle, etc., etc. I have seen them make cattle leap from the upper deck and swim ashore, and I have seen them being pulled up by the horns.

Guayaquil is about sixty miles up the Guayas, which is about a mile wide at the city. This place is healthful now, although she used to be a plague spot.

Floating islands in the river, native rafts of bamboo, make good views. And the main thing I remember was the rafts of live cattle that are brought down with the tide and landed at the slaughter-house below the city. They lash poles across canoes and tie about twelve cattle to the poles by the horns. A man stands in the canoe and prods the cattle to make them swim, and with the tide they are said to make about twelve miles an hour. I never have been able to get any one to believe this, and if you get a chance to snap-shot one be sure and send me a copy.

The end of the G. & Q. Railroad is across the river at Duran and is reached by launch. There is an American superintendent of terminals over there and an American master mechanic and a few other employees. The general offices are at Huigra, a few hours up the mountains. When I went up I stopped at Huigra overnight and made a day's stop at Riobamba, and Latacunga to look over the country. If a man has any gift of gab he can ride with some American freight conductor all the way, or perhaps with a passenger conductor. The trouble on the passengers now is that they have Scotch collectors who don't know what a friendly ride is. I have made the trip twice and had good luck.

Otherwise you might find it just as cheap and more interesting to go from Guayaquil up the river to Bodegas and hire a mule and make the trip in this fashion. It's torrid when you leave the coast, and up in the mountains it is likely to be raw. What I mean is that it's a rough trip but can be made over a known road, and it is interesting for the first half for the many changes caused by the climb.

After you get up on the top of the series of plateaus you will find three of them like stair steps and with snow-white peaks lining both sides with here and there a smoking volcano. If you get a good view of Chimborazo and Cotopaxi on a clear day you will never forget them. You will see them by either route.

The railroad is a wonderful piece of work, especially in its climb up the slopes, which start about thirty miles from Duran. They don't run at night, and take two days to make the trip to Quito.

There are many things around and in Quito of value. There is an old volcano near the city, and the trip can be made right up the side and into the edge of the crater by mule-back. Now from Quito to Papallacta is a mule trail and you can either telephone out there and have mules sent in for you or hike it in about the same time it would take you to ride.

This is the first town you will begin to see the Oriente Indians, who are not inhabitants but have come over with packs and for the mail. They wear B. V. D.-like drawers and bark shirts (a wonderful souvenir) and wear their hair down their backs and with the front cut to a bang over the eyes. They are the tamest Indians in the whole world. You can hire one to carry your pack all the way from Papallacta to Napo for $2.50, and he will furnish his own *coca* (grub) and his wife will possibly go along to keep him company.

It isn't so far from Quito to Napo, but it is one of the worst trails in the whole world. It is only seventy-six miles, but the Indians take from five to eight days to make it with a load of a hundred pounds. The steepest of it is from Papallacta to Bajesa, from where it is a down-hill pull.

The Indians will carry women over in *sillas* on their backs. The woman sits in the seat about half-way up the Indian's back and faces to the rear. It is an uncomfortable position and the vines are bothersome. I do not know of any white woman (English or American) who has made it; but there is a record of a limey duke who had them carry him part of the way. That side of the Andes in Ecuador has been just about as it was when Columbus discovered America, and due to a little boosting I have given it there are some Americans over there now.

Booze is the main trouble over there; almost everybody stays drunk all the time on cane brandy.

It is six hundred and fifty miles from Napo to the mouth of the river where it empties into the Amazon, and the Indians make it with a canoe in five days (two weeks to get back). It is a half day's paddling up-river from the mouth of the Napo to Iquitos, Peru, which is a modern city with electric lights and with steamers sailing to New York City and Europe. You can jump a boat there and get down the Amazon and out to New York or the West Indies, but I wouldn't suggest doing it. It is a monotonous trip, as any man who has made it will swear; and you have seen all the same country on the lower Napo and on the trip up-stream on the Amazon to Iquitos. The only thing of possible interest is Manaos, Brazil, which is a great rubber port and a classy place in all respects.

My suggestion would be as follows: From Iquitos make arrangements to go up the Ucuyali until you hit the post road for Cerro de Pasco, a big American copper mining and smelting camp with a good bunch of Americans working there, good club-houses and hospitality. There is their line of railroad down to Oroya and the Peru Central R. R. up the west side of the Andes and down the Pacific slope. The tunnel at Galera is at 15,865 feet and from there down it is the most wonderful railroad in the whole world, making thirteen switchbacks, crossing bridges over narrow chasms so high that it strains the eyes to see bottom (the bridge at Devil's Leap is bolted to rocks on each side) and boring through sixty-seven tunnels. You can see the old Inca terraces from the car window, and you will be able to see many of their ruins. (There is an old Inca smelter at Cerro.)

The railroad will land you at Lima, which is a modern city with good hotels (the Maury is the best, but the Cardinal is cheaper and I stopped at it) and you can either take the same train for Callao or ride the few miles over on a rapid transit. And from Callao you can hop back to Panama by steamer.

This trip I have outlined will take you right into the heart of South America. You will make a cross section from sea-level at Guayaquil to 900 feet above sea level on the Amazon and repeat with variations back through Peru.

With good luck it could be made in the following

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time: Six days by coast boat to Guayaquil, two days to Quito, eight days to Napo, five to Iquitos, two weeks to end of post road on Ucuyali, nine days to Cerro (or less), one day to Lima, eight days to Panama. This is minimum time, and you could easily take three months in doing it proper.

If you wanted to vary it you could do as follows: Make trip Quito to Napo to see what it is like and to get a look at primitive people and then come back to Quito and hire a mule and make trip over old Inca highway to Bogota, Colombia. This trip is possible, although the old Inca road is almost gone in places and there is some terribly rough going and mud in places. From Bogota you could go down to Honda and get a river boat down the Magdalena to Savanilla or stop at end of little railroad and go across to Cartagena, where you could get the Royal Mail for Colon.

You don't need to be in any fear of the Indians over the route I have mentioned. The Jiveros are far to the south on the Peruvian border along the Amazon in a little stretch running into both republics. Some of the Americans there in Ecuador talk about Jiveros being over in Oriente, but they are talking ragtime. The trail is being made almost daily. There is also a safe route across from Riobamba but I don't know the details of it.

If you do decide you want to go across Colombia instead of this route I have mapped out you can take a boat to Buenaventura and railroad up to Cali, muleback across to Bogota and down to Honda and down the river, but it is a tame trip to what I have mapped.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

Lugers

BRO. WIGGINS registers dislike for 'em; and he knows why:

Question:—"Am taking advantage of your connection with *Adventure* to ask if you can answer a few questions regarding the Luger 7.65 m. m. or .30-cal. pistol.

Is it dependable, and has it, say with a soft-nose bullet, enough shocking-power to stop a deer?

Also, can you advise me what test was given this arm by the Germans before adopting it for their army? Also how this gun "stacks up" for all-around work with our American-made Colts?

I am a member of the Chicago Revolver Club, and use a Smith & Wesson .38-cal. special, 6-inch barrel, for target work, using a reduced load for 20-yard work, and find it a splendidly accurate gun.

Would certainly appreciate your views on the Luger—also any information as to its accuracy, trajectory, muzzle velocity, etc."—DONALD D. RAYMOND, Camp Lake, Wis.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—I don't have much confidence in, or admiration for, the Luger pistol in the .30 caliber. I have had too many of them—brand new, from which I have just taken the grease placed there by the makers—jam with me, using factory-loaded ammunition. Some of them are reliable, but I can't have any patience with a revolver or pistol that "ties up" even once with me.

Never found any automatic pistol other than the Remington that would not jam sometimes. Think the ammunition is largely to blame, but a defective cartridge in a revolver does not cause trouble, as all you need to do is cock it again, and she's ready to go.

Yes, with soft-point ammunition the Luger will kill deer, if hit in a vital spot. But Mr. M. Stanton, a friend of the writer, killed three big bucks with five shots of his .38 S. & W. special; how's that?

As for Army tests, I presume they are tested for rust, dust, and other causes of malfunctions; with overloaded cartridges, and oiled and dry. It's very severe anyhow. But the German regulations called for a slap of the hands on the lines between each shot, to make sure they were closed.

For all-around work I would rather have that .38 Smith & Wesson special than the Luger. With the reduced loads you can have fun at the ranges, and with the cartridge known as the .38 *Colt special*, having a square-nosed bullet, you will find it a killer on deer within its distance. Better stick to it, rather than experiment with the Luger.

I enclose a ballistic table showing the comparative power of the popular pistols.

Clamming and Button-Shelling

GOOD wages in this if you can find the clams near enough to the market:

Question:—"I would ask you a few questions in regards to clam-fishing in Ohio streams. I was born in Ohio and was there until my twelfth year, then went West. My intentions are going back to Ohio and try clam-fishing. I know when I was a boy wading some of the streams were full of clams. There were two kinds of clams—yellow-meated and white-meated clams. Now what I would like to know is, are either of these clams good for food?

Can the shells of either of those clams be used?

If they can be used please let me know what they are used for.

Where I could dispose of them?

Are they sold by the pound or by the ton?

Would it be a paying proposition?

Could you quote to me what I could get a pound or ton for them?

I know of streams in Ohio where there is a lot of both kinds of these clams, and am anxious to know if there is any use for them."—JOHN A. KUHN, Bonners Ferry, Idaho.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—Over on this slip are answers to a number of your questions.

For some unexplained reason fresh-water clams are often poisonous and dangerous to eat. No one seems to know what causes this.

The Ohio clams are good for button stock, and some are fished for this. They are sold by the ton for buttons, and lists of markets can be had from Bureau of Fisheries, Washington, D. C.; also from Superintendent of Public Documents, Washington, D. C., many bulletins regarding the button shells.

Shellers make up to a thousand dollars a season, often more, if they can find shells. But streams are mostly overfished now, and shells hard to find. They run to $40 a ton, I believe, and some fancy stock higher, but it depends on the kind and quality and also whether in a region where field buyers come through.

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A Summer Trip to Iceland

HERE are the complete directions for getting there from New York. Of course, by the time this appears in print the passport restrictions may be abolished or changed:

Question:—"I would like to ask you a few questions about Iceland, as I am thinking of visiting it next Summer if I can save the money to do so.

1. What is the cost of transportation there second class, starting from New York?
2. Do I trans-ship at Liverpool, or at the Isle of Man?
3. Would I have to order my rooms at the Traveler's Hotel at Reykjavik in advance?
4. What is the cost of a guide?
5. What kind of an outfit if any, should I provide myself with, touring Iceland in August?
6. Do the guides talk English?
7. Avoiding unnecessary expenditure, would $600 cover the round trip from New York, traveling second class and allowing for a fortnight's hike around the island?
8. How should I go about providing myself with passports, and how many should I get?
9. Is American or English money accepted in Iceland?

I hope you will not think these too many questions.

From the time I was seventeen years, I have wanted to see this little-known land. What started my interest was a moving-picture version of Hall Caine's 'The Bondman.' Next I read the book, and later read all I could about Iceland, including 'The Norroena,' a compilation of the Elder Eddas of Saemund Sigfusson and the Younger Eddas of Snorri Sturlussen.

And so I want to see Mount Hecla, and the Mount of Laws in Thingvellir, and the Great Geyser, and the old dolmens with runes chiseled on them.

I am a section-hand of 23 years in upper Michigan, and while I have home ties here, my people have not much interest in other countries, as they are all American of the 'Yankee' variety."—RICHARD EARLE, Marenisco, Mich.

Answer, by Mr. Townsend:—1. There are two routes by which you can reach Iceland. The first is by the Scandinavian-American Line from New York to Copenhagen, there trans-shipping to the Danish Royal Mail Line, which runs monthly sailings to Reykjavik *via* Leith, Scotland. The second is by the Norwegian-American Line from New York to Bergen (Norway) there trans-shipping to the B. & N. Line, which also has monthly sailings for Reykjavik, *via* the Faroe Islands.

The fare either way is about the same, and is approximately as follows: On either line from New York to Scandinavia second class, one way $150; round trip, $300. From either Copenhagen or Bergen to Reykjavik first class, one way $30 (Danish or Norwegian kroner 150) round trip $60. (There is probably only one class on these ships.)

2. This is the best way to go, to my way of thinking.

3. When you have decided to go I would advise you to write to the Scandinavian-American Line, the Norwegian-American Line or the American Express Company, all in New York, tell them about three months in advance of the time you desire to go just what route you will take, and they will sell you your ticket for your whole trip over and back, as well as making your hotel reservation in Reykjavik for you.

4. For a trip such as yours a guide is not necessary. The roads are good, and you can easily find your way. The official language of Iceland is naturally Danish, but you will probably find that a great many persons there understand English.

5. I would take any sort of good outing clothes you have. You will need a good raincoat and some water-proof shoes.

6. See No. 4.

7. I should think that $600 would cover your expenses for such a trip. Of course it may be more or less expensive next Summer, depending upon the rate of exchange.

8. About one month before you intend to sail, you must write to the Department of State, Washington, D. C. (Bureau for American Passports) and ask for an application for a passport, which will be sent you with the necessary instructions for filling it out. When you have obtained your American passport (without it you could not leave the United States) as you will probably sail from New York, you can leave your home about two days earlier than is necessary to catch your steamer, and get it viséd (stamped) by the Norwegian or Danish Consul, depending upon which route you select. This is also absolutely necessary, as without this stamp you could not land upon the other side. The address of both consuls is in the New York City telephone directory.

9. Danish money is in use in Iceland and is called kroner (crowns). Today's paper gave their value as 20.77 cents in our money. Of course this value may change before you go.

I hope this will aid you in deciding about your trip. If you want any more specific information, just write to one of the three companies I suggested in New York City and they will inform you upon any phase of it you desire.

I hope you will have the best of luck when you go, and I know you will enjoy it.

When you get something for nothing, don't make the other fellow pay the postage on it.

Canoeing, Edmonton to Lake Winnipeg

THE abbreviation used by Mr. Hague in the subjoined correspondence stands for Royal Canadian Mounted Police, successor to the Royal Northwestern M. P.:

Question:—"Since writing my first letter to you I have received maps and pamphlets from the Department of the Interior at Ottawa, covering the entire district, also letters from towns and cities along the river; received also from Ottawa profile of both south and north Saskatchewan Rivers showing distance, horizontal and vertical, from Lethbridge to Lake Winnipeg, about one thousand miles with a fall of about fifteen hundred feet.

About all the information I need now is cost. Can the trip be made all the way by canoe, or is lake too rough? Can entire trip be made in thirty days?

We are going more for the outing than anything else, so perhaps will go in the Spring.

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Can you give me some idea of the cost of large canoe?

About killing game birds for camp: Are there any laws or rules excepting the printed game laws? If not it would cost quite a little to hunt in each province.

And about guides. We want to get through without one if possible; as we have lots of time seems as though we could paddle our own canoe. About what are the charges for river guides?

Barring unforeseen trouble, about how many days supply of grub would we have to carry? Of course we do our own cooking same as any campers; but do not intend to do any baking."—CHAS. H. ESTES, Spokane, Wash.

Answer, by Mr. Hague:—There would be no difficulty traveling from Edmonton to Lake Winnipeg by canoe as the waterway is very good; and the trip could easily be made in thirty days, allowing you ample time along the route. One of the principal difficulties is lack of good camping-places; but if you get in touch with R. C. M. P. at Edmonton or Lethbridge before starting they could give you a lot of valuable information in this direction.

The best way to outfit is to place yourself in the hands of a firm such as the Hudson's Bay Company, who will know exactly what you need and can if necessary supply you with a guide. An eighteen-foot freighter canoe would cost in the neighborhood of one hundred and sixty dollars, but you should have a chance of disposing of it second-hand when you reach your destination on Lake Winnipeg. I do not think it would be really necessary to take a guide; but if you did have one he would cost you around three dollars and fifty cents a day, and you would have to pay him right to the time he returned to his home.

There are no laws regarding the killing of game apart from those printed with the exception that north of fifty-three you can shoot anything for your own consumption; and you would be quite a bit of the way north of the fifty-third parallel.

Would advise taking ample rations for the time you intend to be on the trip, although you could replenish supplies at some points. To take enough bread for a bunch for a month is quite a business, and I would advise making bannocks *en route*.

If you pass through The Pas look me up. You will have no difficulty in locating me.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible*. All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

OGG, JOHN (also known as Jack and Scotty). Travelling salesman. Age twenty-three, curly brown hair, fair complexion and medium height. Last heard from in Windsor, Ont. Any information will be appreciated by his sister Nan.—Address L. T., 454, care of *Adventure*.

FULLER, W. J. Late of S. S. *National Bridge*. Please communicate with.—Address R. L. SHANNON, 1003 Swiney Ave., Fort Wayne, Indiana.

FURTADO, MARY. Last heard of in San Luis Obispo, Calif. Brunette, about five feet eight inches tall. Any information will be appreciated by her daughter.—Address MRS. EMILY SANTO, 724 11th St., Oakland, Calif.

BURNETT, THOS. Resident of Marion, Ill. Is probably employed as telegrapher for the Union Pacific R. R. Last seen in Los Angeles, Calif., in 1913. Remember your old side kick "Ignatz," of Oakland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, and the Cudahy Fire Hall. Write me.—Address BROWN, care of *Adventure*.

LOUIS (husband). Everything O. K. Know all. Write to M. and G. only.—Address M., 1137 Hester Ave., San Jose, Calif.

PORTER, EDWARD BECK. Last heard of was at Angel Island, California. Was staff-sergeant in U. S. Army. Was released July 11, 1922. Spent three years in army Coast Artillery Corps. Was in Panama in year of 1919-1920. Fort Monroe, Va., year of 1920-1921. And in Hawaiian Islands 1921-1922. Age twenty-two, blue eyes, light hair, slender build, about six feet tall. Had one upper lateral incisor missing. Any information will be appreciated by his old friend.—Address "DUKE," care of Vanderbilt University, Dental Dept., Nashville, Tenn.

MARTIN, NATE. Left Petersburg, Ill., in 1903 or 1904 for Montana. Please write to your old friend.—Address DEE HORNBACK, Missoula, Mont.

HOFFMAN, WILLIAM. About fifty years old; last heard of about 1904 while connected with the Frisco R. R. at Sherman, Texas. If still living would probably be railroading. Any information will be appreciated.—ADDRESS R. C. HOFFMAN, 2143 K. St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

MCGOVERN, JAMES and JOSEPH. Left Marshall, Mich. about forty-nine years ago with their brother Will. Will died fifteen years ago. The last heard of Jim and Joe was from around Fargo, North Dakota. They have probably gone West. Any information will be appreciated.—Address FRANK J. MCGOVERN, JR., 161 Prospect Place, Brooklyn, N. Y.

BRENNAN, JACK. Ex-11th Cav., U. S. V. Served in the P. I. Last heard of was in New Mexico during 1906. Any information will be appreciated.—Address W. K. KENNEDY, P. O. Box 1409, Manila, P. I.

CORLEY, CHARLES. Ex-33 Inf. U. S. V. Served in the P. I. Last heard of was in the Imperial Valley country. Any information will be appreciated.—Address W. K. KENNEDY, P. O. Box 1409, Manila, P. I.

HUFF, RAY or sister VERA. Last heard of in 1919 at La Jolla, Calif., where Vera attended the Bishop school. Probably somewhere in Saskatchewan, Canada. Any information will be appreciated.—Address THOMAS H. WINTERS, 797 East Broadway, Boston, Mass.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

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MILLER, CHARLES. Worked at the Maryland plant of the Bethlehem Steel Corp. during the war. Later went to Woodlawn, Pa. Important news for you if you will write.—Address JACK LANAHAW, care of The Bell Board, San Francisco, Calif.

EDDIE. Why don't you write. Everything O. K. Drop me a line at my business.—Address. ED.

O'DONNELL, MICHAEL C. Last heard from in July, 1921. Discharged from U. S. N. July, 1921 at San Francisco, Calif. Please write to mother.

CLOUD, CHARLES. Dark hair, blue eyes, age twenty-eight. Last heard from aboard U. S. S. *Tacoma* at Tampico, Mexico, 1914, just previous to Vera Cruz trouble. Any information will be appreciated.—Address WM. B. BRADY, 142 North St., Middletown, New York.

WAMMACK, RAY. Last heard of in Kansas City. Was bridge builder for Midland Valley, Muskogee, Okla. Any information will be appreciated by his brother. —Address BRINEY E. WAMMACK, 714 Fourth Ave., Dallas, Texas.

NORTON, WALTER, PROF. Resided at 167 Lexington Ave., N. Y. C., in 1919. Any information will be appreciated.—Address L. L. Bishop, R. 1., Box 3, Oberlin, Kansas.

LINDSAY, WILLARD C. (ex-marine). Was in Puerta Plata, San Domingo, in 1921. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address MRS. VERA TRAVERS, South San Antonio, Texas.

CARVER, BERNARD R. Age twenty years, five feet five inches tall, weighs about 130 lbs., medium brown hair, brown eyes and olive complexion. Enlisted in Fall of 1917 as private, stationed at Ft. Thomas, Ky. Transferred to Ft. Meyer, Va., in 136th Field Artillery, and ordered overseas to France in the 52nd Coast Artillery A. E. F. Has slight shrapnel wounds about face and on hands. Returned to United States after 18 months' service in France and discharged honorably in Fort Meyer, Va. Wrote letter from Tulsa, Okla., in Aug. 1920, and never heard from since. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address MRS. ELLEN C. RIESEBERG, 3633 New Hampshire Ave., Washington, D. C.

MILLER, MR. Was employed as foreman in publishing house in 1904-5. Was then about fifty-five years of age. Had two daughters, one called Freddie, and one son. Lives around 120th to 150th Sts. on 8th or 3rd Ave. Wore beard. Any information will be appreciated—Address ARTHUR HOCTER, care of Brower, 299 W. 137th St., N. Y. C.

THE following have been inquired for in either the April 30 or May 20th issues of Adventure. They can get the name and address of the inquirer from this magazine.

ADAMS, LYDIA and Myrtle (sisters); Anderson, Abel Pontus; Baker, H. W.; Bennett, Howard; Benjamin, James; Bildog, Morgan; Campbell, Fred C.; Chapman, Frederick Wilson; Coleman, Anna Mae and Eva Verline; Damon, George B.; Davis, Ralph E.; Davies, John Kirker; De Vaile, Louis; Drake, Elmer; Eberhardt, Sarah and Virginia; Economu, August; Ellis, Walter S.; Ennis, Henry; Evans, James Booth; Forman, J. B.; French, Dewight; Graham, L. B.; Green, C. O.; Hamilton, G. A.; Hall, Hill and Valentine; Haynie, Thomas Sexton; Holly, Geo. and Joe; Howard; Johnson, Bill; Johnson, O. W.; Kavash, Samuel; Koyoto, Whitey; Lane, James A.; Locke, Charles E.; Lysoe, Meta M.; Mackeys, or Mackie Louis; McGee, Martin; McPherson, Norman; McRobert, Charles; McWilliams, Walter; Murdaugh, Roy H.; Napier, Harry; Noll, Frank; Perry, Robert R.; Plint, Mary; Puzar, Julius; Sailor, Bob; Samuel, Merton, H.; Saxton, Samuel, Hugh, Joshua and Thomas; Schaffer, Gabriel; Seaton, James Arthur; Shannon; Naylor; Lettow; Davis; Lewis; Dunn; Pratt; Eames; Sharpe, Cecil; Tate, Thomas; Vanderpool, Martha, Elizabeth, Nancy, Christie, Mary, Willis, Joe and Johnnie; Van Deusen, William, and Mrs. Belle Van Deusen; Via, Dellman H.; Wilcox, Arthur M.; Wilson, Edgar; Wood, Carl Herbert; Woolery or Wickwire family; Young, Joy.

MISCELLANEOUS—Boster brothers; C. L. W. of Ft. Clayton, Panama; Helen, H.; Peter Joe; "Shun" Duke Shelton, Victor Alvin, Moe Henery, Devlin (97) Kelley, Lynch (Honolulu) fall out and report W. A. B.; W. V. M.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given do not reach you.—Address L. PATRICK GREENE, care of *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

JUNE 20TH ISSUE

Besides the **complete novel** and the **two complete novelettes** mentioned on the second page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

THE PIGEONS OF WONG FOO — *J. Allan Dunn*
Pearls, sea outlaws—and a resourceful Chinaman.

FRETFUL MUNCHER An Off-the-Trail Story* — *Raymond S. Spears*
A hog tie-up.

THE RAT TRAP — *Dale Collins*
What the stowaway was up against.

HAWK HATRED — *F. St. Mars*
The flight of a hawk is interrupted.

HURRICANE WILLIAMS' VENGEANCE A Four-Part Story Part III — *Gordon Young*
Bloody deeds of evil white men.

BLACK DANGER — *Mary Shannon*
A thoroughbred horse—and the spirit of the Old West.

FOILS OF FATE — *Ruland V. E. Waltner*
Murder and the unexpected solution.

GIVENS' RETURN — *Howard F. Gaiser*
A deserter has his day.

**See note at foot of first contents page.*

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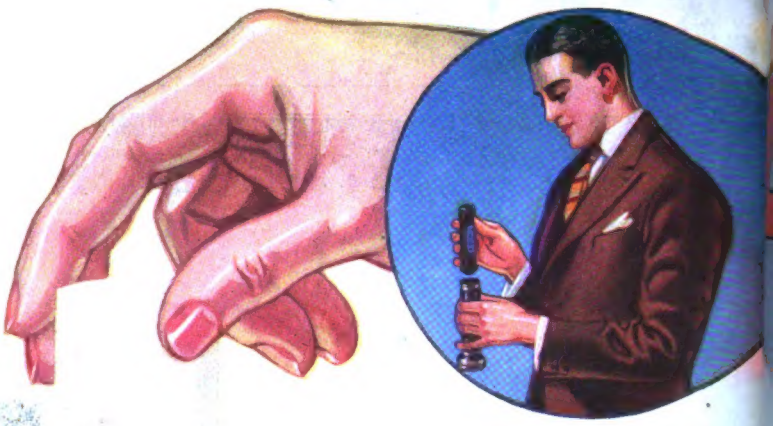

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